

An Exploration of Male Adolescents' Body Image Perceptions

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Abstract

There has been an increasing concern among researchers and the general population of our culture's increasing emphasis on "ideal" physical attractiveness—for both females and males. Despite this growing concern, research on body image has focused primarily on women and girls, with little research aimed specifically for males. Prior research (Grogan & Richards, 2002; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006) stated that body image was a "feminine" or a "gay" issue, according to men and boys. The present study investigates this issue, particularly within the theoretical framework of multiple selves and gender theories. This exploratory case study involved semi-structured interviews with six male adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 years. Researcher's fieldnotes were taken after the interviews. Content analysis of the interviews and fieldnotes revealed that for these six male adolescents, body image is not relevant to them, as they think about and discuss their issues of physical appearance with family and close peers. Traditional stereotypic notions of masculinity and what it means to be an adolescent male for the participants are discussed within the context of developmentally appropriate and gender-inclusive curriculum.

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“It takes a whole village to raise a child”
- African Proverb

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

I originally began my research in body image during my second year of undergraduate studies as a volunteer and then eventually a research assistant for Professor Janet Polivy. Over the years of working in her lab I developed an interest in her research on eating behavior, body image, and dieting. I was particularly interested in exploring why some people go to extreme lengths, either through exercise or dieting, to attain an unrealistic beauty ideal while for others it is not an issue. What makes some individuals more vulnerable to finding imperfections with their bodies? What makes some individuals more vulnerable to eating disorders? I spent a large portion of my undergraduate career immersed in this line of research, from my research assistantships to my independent research paper in my final year of university.

Being fully immersed in this type of research, I began comparing my own experiences with my own issues of body image. I grew up in a predominantly White neighborhood in a suburb in the Greater Toronto Area. I can say with certainty that I did not fit the female beauty ideal, as defined by the school I attended. I was short, sometimes too skinny, sometimes chubby, and flat-chested until I was 18. I had short black hair and wore the same bowl-cut hairstyle for many years. The way I looked was constantly on my mind. I spent many hours looking at myself in the mirror and comparing myself to other girls, thinking of new ways of changing my diet or exercise to look like them. How I look and present myself to the world around me was and is a constant thought that I deal with on a daily basis, as I continue to balance between aspects of myself that I accept and aspects of myself that I strive to change. It was these

experiences that drove me to continue my research interests in this field after my undergraduate degree.

Upon graduating, I was given the opportunity to work as a research assistant for a program for eating disorders in Toronto. There, I interacted with individuals who were diagnosed with an eating disorder and for some, had comorbid psychological issues such as body dysmorphic disorder (as defined by an excessive imagined or exaggerated preoccupation towards a perceived defect in physical appearance; American Psychiatric Association, 2000), depression, and anxiety. I was amazed at the complexity and uniqueness of each case. I was even more amazed at the number of men who were also in the program. I had not realized that men could also be insecure about their bodies, to the point of also suffering from an eating disorder. That is where my interest in male body image began: almost all of the measures used in assessing body image and subsequent programs (both intervention and prevention) were female-orientated. I sympathized with the men in the program, who could not relate to issues of breast or hip size, or wanting to be thinner like female super models.

In addition to the male patients in the program, I also noticed that media coverage and television programs on body image and its affects on self-esteem and eating behaviors excluded the experiences of men and boys. I began to ask myself: do men have ideal body types to measure up to or to compare and evaluate themselves against the norm? How do men and boys feel about themselves when looking at stereotypic photos of male models in magazines or on television and movies?

Since beginning my Master of Education degree, questions continued to loom in my mind: Why is there limited research on male body image? Why is society in general

not addressing male body image as they do with women and girls? Most importantly, what can be done to raise awareness of the dangers of attaining a societal beauty ideal, and ultimately decrease the prevalence of not only having a negative body image, but also the extreme behaviors and thoughts that accompany it?

Background of the Problem

Schilder (1950) first described body image as an interaction of the experiences and reflections of how an individual perceives him- or herself. This self-perception includes the perceptions of the people around the individual. Grogan (2001) defined body image as “a person’s perceptions, thoughts and feelings about his or her body” (p. 1). More recently, body image has been a ubiquitous topic in the media, particularly due to its connections to self-esteem, self-concept, and identity. When one thinks of body image, of immediate thought is how today beauty ideals, particularly the thin ideal, affects girls and women. Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz, and Thompson (1980) first noted that female models and pageant contestants had become progressively thinner from 1960 to 1979. Since this landmark study, it has become increasingly obvious the ways in which western society places importance on physical appearance. Similar research examining boys’ action figures (Pope, Olivardia, Gruber, & Borowiecki, 1999) and male playgirl centerfolds (Leit, Pope, & Gray, 2001) found that over time, the ideal male body, as depicted in action figures and in male models, has become more muscular and has had an overall decrease in body fat.

Recent research on male video game characters found similar results to these previous studies. In particular, Martins, Williams, Ratan, and Harrison (2011) compared the bodies of male characters in popular video games to that of averaged sized men and

found that regardless of how realistic the video game characters appeared to be, their average muscular build was still larger than average sized men. Thus, it seems that western society is placing an ever-increasing emphasis on physical appearance in men and boys (Martins et al. 2011; Pope et al., 1999), just as it does on women and girls.

Despite the growing concern about male beauty standards, men and boys remain reluctant to discuss any of their body image concerns (Atkinson & Kehler, 2010; Cohane & Pope, 2001; Domainé, Berchtold, Akré, Michaud, & Suris, 2009; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006; Kehler, 2010). Cohane and Pope (2001) suggest that this reluctance may be the result of response bias: male adolescents may be embarrassed or sensitive when it comes to discussing issues about their bodies, thereby minimizing their “true degree of dissatisfaction or unhappiness” (p. 377). Recent literature has found that some male adolescents may be reluctant to discuss concerns about their bodies because they may believe that body image, and its subsequent behaviors to alter body shape, is a feminine issue (Grogan & Richards, 2002; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006; Kraye, Ingledew, & Iphofen, 2008) or an issue relevant to gay men (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006; Kraye et al., 2008). The latter finding is not surprising, as previous studies (Elliott & Elliott, 2005) examined men’s reactions to advertisements depicting male models and found that these men responded negatively to the models, referring to the advertisements as characteristically “homosexual”, as defined in the study as a man who possessed effeminate characteristics.

More recent research (Martin & Gnoth, 2009) investigated the effects of gender identity on reactions to masculine, feminine, or androgynous-looking male models. In this study, the definition of masculine men pertained to tending “to support the

dominance of traditional masculinity, are more likely than other gender identities to be intolerant of those who deviate from gender norms, and strongly avoid the negative associations of femininity in men” (p. 7) whereas the definition of feminine men were individuals who lacked the characteristics of masculine men and thus, tend to reject the appearance of masculinity. It was found that masculine men favored masculine male models and were more negative to feminine male models while feminine men still preferred stereotypically masculine male models. The results of this study suggest that there is an understanding of what types of masculinity are preferred within our society.

Although Martin and Gnoth (2009) defined the notions of masculine men and feminine men, what was not established in their study is the definition of masculinity, in particular, “traditional masculinity”. A review of literature by Smiler (2004) revealed that historically, the definition of masculinity has shifted from a single ideal of “active, rational, strong, and community-oriented” (p. 17) to adapting a wider variety of masculinities (Chadwick & Foster, 2007; Smiler, 2004). Tragos (2009) stated that within contemporary gender roles, men are expected to be both strong and sensitive. Chadwick and Foster (2007) interviewed group of straight, young men and revealed that the notion of “traditional masculinity”, as defined by “the macho man” (p. 32) was not necessarily their definition of masculinity. Rather, their participants saw masculinity as having an innate “softness or sensitivity” (Chadwick & Foster, 2007, p. 33). The authors state that while gender lines have blurred, “gender relations are clearly still undergoing challenging local and global upheavals” (Chadwick & Foster, 2007, p. 36).

Statement of Problem

Among researchers and theorists, there seems to be a consensus that, during adolescence, individuals experiment with differing roles that prepare them for adulthood. This includes the definition of masculinity and how that affects how male adolescents ultimately portray themselves. How, where, and from whom do male adolescents learn the definition of masculinity? How are these definitions reinforced? Given that researchers have found that males believe body image is a “feminine” or “gay” issue (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006; Kraye et al., 2008), it is important to address body image issues during adolescent development, as gender and the roles associated with it become more defined (Bosacki, 2001). Although there is a growing body of research, researchers are only in the beginning stages of studying male body image. The current literature has yet to address why male adolescents are reluctant to discuss their body concerns, particularly, why they view body image as a “gay” issue. Where and how are these stereotypes learned? Currently, it seems that this masculine stereotype is learned from a plethora of resources, including parents, peers, and media. In addition, it also seems that this stereotype is reinforced through socialization, particularly the need to present oneself in an appropriate gender (Connell, 2005; Goffman, 1959; Kehler, 2009).

Researchers and educators have begun to realize the dangers of holding such unattainable beauty ideal, and have begun to create prevention programs (McCabe, Ricciardelli, & Karantzas, 2010; McVey, Tweed, & Blakemore, 2007; Richardson, Paxton, & Thomson, 2009; Wilksch, Tiggemann, & Wade, 2006) aimed at promoting beauty in all shapes, sizes, and cultural backgrounds. Despite this movement, there has been little emphasis for addressing male beauty. As much as contemporary researchers,

educators, and the general public deny that body image is not a concern for male adolescents (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006), the current literature does not provide sufficient explanation for the current findings in male body image, which is that men and boys do not experience body image dissatisfaction to the extent that women and girls do.

Another problem in the current literature is that it has been difficult to determine the degree to which male adolescents experience body image concerns, particularly the definition of “ideal male beauty.” As several lines of research have suggested, there are more acceptable sizes ranges that are considered ideal for males (Cohane & Pope, 2001). There have been newer measures aimed at addressing the drive for muscularity, but because some men and boys, regardless of age, seem reluctant to divulge their body image concerns as researchers suggest (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006), it may be difficult to accurately measure body image satisfaction and how it is developed and maintained among male adolescents.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the present study is to explore the perceptions of male body image during adolescence. Particularly, I am interested in how body image is perceived within society in general and how it affects male adolescents on a personal level. Focusing on the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of six male adolescents, my research questions are:

1. What are these male adolescents’ perceptions of their own body image? How did they learn this?
2. Do these male adolescents believe that body image is a “feminine” or “gay” issue? Why or why not?

3. What are these male adolescents' experiences in discussing their body image issues?
4. When do these male adolescents' feel it is appropriate to discuss their body concerns?

Rationale

Although there are a plethora of studies that have examined the impact of body image during adolescence, particularly its impact on self-esteem and eating disturbances, there are few studies that I am aware of that address the development and maintenance of body image. Research (Cohane & Pope, 2001; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006) speculates that male adolescents are reluctant to discuss any issues pertaining to body image. In addition, there are few Canadian studies that I am aware of on male body image. To this day, body image and how it develops remains unclear in male adolescents.

The rationale of the present research is to determine where and how these gender-typical beliefs are established and reinforced in some male adolescents. Specifically, of interest is to determine how male adolescents develop a "masculine" identity, focusing primarily around emerging issues of body image. According to the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) boys and men are expected to be more autonomous, intellectually curious, achievement-oriented, assertive, competitive, aggressive, and logical. Given these expectations, it is possible that male adolescents are indirectly discouraged from expressing concerns they have over their changing bodies. This silence can "create a...negative emotional reaction such as increased self-consciousness and possible anxiety" (Bosacki, 2005, p. 15).

Definition of Terms

Oftentimes, terminology within the social sciences become convoluted as a result of debates in the subject matter. Based on past literature, the following are definitions of terminology used throughout this thesis.

- *Adolescence*. A period of human development after childhood and before adulthood, typically starting around the age of 13 ending around the age of 18. According to Blakemore, Berenbaum, and Liben (2009), adolescence is typically associated with puberty, the physical and psychological changes that transform a child into an adult.
- *Femininity*. Refers to the gender-specific behaviors, thoughts and feelings that are typically associated with female individuals, as defined by western society (Connell, 2005). For example, stereotypical feminine traits are often considered to include the importance of connecting with others and competition “as threats to relationships, and thus to their identities” (Messner, 1990/2009, p. 127).
- *Gender identity*. An individual’s knowledge and feelings as part of a gender, including “feelings of similarity of others of one’s gender, contentedness with being that gender, and a sense of pressure to follow that gender’s roles” (Blakemore et al., 2009, p. 6).
- *Gender-role intensification*. Increased gender stereotyping of attitudes and behavior, and movement toward a more traditional gender identity (Berk, 2005). Gender-role intensification is said to occur during adolescence, where

individuals are most likely to develop more rigid ideals of the roles and expectations of each gender (Bosacki, 2005).

- *Gender stereotypes.* Preconceived beliefs that are held about the true thoughts and behaviors of males and females (Blakemore et al., 2009).
- *Masculinity.* Refers to the gender-specific behaviors, thoughts and feelings that are typically associated with male individuals, as defined by western society (Connell, 2005). For example, Messner (1990/2009) wrote that individuals often “equate masculinity with competition, physical strength, and skills” (p. 127).
- *Muscularity.* Sociocultural standard of beauty for men is one that emphasizes strength. A review of literature by Labre (2002) defines ideal muscularity was one in which the body has well-defined chest and arm muscles, wide shoulders that taper to a narrow waist.
- *The Self.* A cognitive and social representation of an individual’s identity (Harter, 2008).

Theoretical Frameworks

The following section outlines the theoretical basis of this thesis. In exploring an issue such as body image, it is important to discuss the following two theoretical frameworks, as I believe that each framework contributes to body image and is interrelated with one another. First, I discuss the theory of multiple selves, particularly focusing on the concept of aspects of the self that individuals choose to express and aspects they choose to hide. Then I discuss gender theories (Butler, 1999; 2004), particularly the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005), as it pertains to how

culturally-constructed gender norms sets the stage for male adolescents, particularly in determining gender appropriate ways of behaving (Kehler, 2009).

Multiple Selves

According to Harter (1990), the self is a social construction, based largely on others' beliefs about the self. These significant others include parents, classmates, and close friends. As the individual transitions from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, the way they see themselves shifts from being context-dependent to more internalized beliefs of the self. Harter (1990) states that individuals who do not shift into this stage during late adolescence may result in an increased risk of maladaptive behaviors because they do not have an internalized sense of self.

Individuals learn from an early age that the ways in which one presents oneself to the world can be controlled such that we decide what thoughts, feelings, and behaviors we can exhibit and hide from others. This idea of the front, as suggested by Goffman (1959) is "part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (p. 22). In essence, an individual portrays a specific persona that is appropriate for the situation, regardless of whether this persona coincides with his or her real self. In the case where it does not coincide, the individual is "expected to suppress his immediate heartfelt feelings, conveying a view of the situation which he feels the others will be able to find at least temporarily acceptable" (Goffman, 1959, p. 9).

This persona is seen throughout adolescence, where it is undoubtedly a time where individuals begin to explore different identities that prepare them for adulthood. Differentiation is important, as it allows for adolescents to socialize in various situational

roles that they encounter (Harter, 1990). Research by Harter, Bresnick, Bouchee, and Whitesell (1997/2002) has found evidence that the self becomes increasingly differentiated, especially during adolescence where the self is dependent on the context of the situation. Thus the creation of multiple selves is imperative, such that each self must adhere to a particular relationship with which they are faced with (Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, 1997).

Harter et al. (1997/2002) further states that adolescence is particularly important, as most adolescents juggle issues of authenticity. It is believed that adolescence is a time when individuals begin to recognize contradictory attitudes that they may hold. Adolescents are motivated to engage in false-self behavior as a means to impress others, to try different behaviors and roles, because they are forced to, and/or because others do not understand or like their true selves (Harter, 1990). It is not until late adolescence where they begin to realize and integrate seemingly contradictory selves. Integration of these differing selves leads to the realization that it is quite normal to have opposing attributes (Harter et al., 1997/2002). Conversely, Harter (1990) believes that if one's multiple selves are inconsistent with one another over long periods of time, then individuals begin to realize the contradictions and inner conflicts of the selves. This excessive conflict of the selves is suggested to put the individual at psychological risk.

Gender Theories

Butler (1999) states that both biological sex and gender are both cultural constructions and argues that:

Gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which "sexed nature" or a "natural sex" is produced and established as

“prediscursive,” prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts. (p. 11)

Despite anatomical differences between what is biologically male and what is biologically female, the definitions of these biological sexes are still culturally constructed because it is society that initially defined the physical characteristics of male and female. When we are born, we are immediately labeled, “It’s a boy!” or “It’s a girl!” From that moment on, we are socialized within the confines of our assigned sex. Because of this, Butler (1999) postulates that in our society, sex and gender are difficult to separate and thus are both culturally constructed.

Based on the cultural constructed definitions of what it means to be male and what it means to be female, Butler (1999) suggests the notion of heteronormativity. Gender as a norm, operates within social practices as the implicit standard of normalization. In essence, Butler (2004) states that “gender is a mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized” (p. 42), thus, the “unity” of gender is the effect of a regulatory practice that seeks to render gender identity uniform through a compulsory heterosexuality” (p. 42). Compulsory heterosexuality then assumes that all individuals not only exhibit behaviors that are reflective of their biological sex, but also these individuals by default are attracted to individuals of the opposite sex. Thus, gender identities that do not conform to the norms of a given society will “appear...as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain” (Butler, 2004, p. 24).

Connell (2005) defines hegemonic masculinity as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (p. 77). This subordination, however, is not limited to women, as it also applies to gay men and other marginalized individuals. He further suggests the notion of role theory, as it “exaggerates the degree to which people’s social behavior is prescribed. But at the same time, by assuming that the prescriptions are reciprocal, it underplays social inequality and power” (Connell, 2005, p. 26). In other words, Connell (2005) suggests that to be masculine, an individual must enact a general set of expectations attached to the male sex. This cultural construction of gender, to justify its social position, gives the appearance of a naturally occurring entity. Thus, it is in sex role theory that this categorization or two dichotomous categories of male and female exaggerates the differences between the two and is considered necessary.

Western society epitomizes the masculine ideal as one who is heroic—as reflective in advertisements (Connell, 2005). Connell gives the example of advertisements recruiting young men into the army, as it reinforces the hegemonic masculinity prevalent in society, as it encourages or teaches young boys to believe that to be masculine, one must be strong and dominant over those who are weaker. In addition, Zipes (2006) states, “masculine domination is...much older than the civilizing process and thus inherent in it” (p. 21). The notion of masculinity has been normalized such that to live civilly within society, boys and men must not only understand but also conform to the social codes respective of the culture bound within that society. In turn, by conforming to these social codes, it also determines their sexual identity and social status.

Kehler (2009) stresses the presence of hegemonic masculinity in the school environment. In particular, he states that boys who do not conform to a certain standard of masculinity are subjected to labels such as “fag”, “freak”, or “gay”—denoting a failure to being masculine. Based on his ethnographic studies, it was clear that for boys, conveying masculine behaviors is a complicated process, particularly when it comes to “expressions of personal feelings, close physical proximity, and genuine and careful listening” (p. 215), as it “become[s] dangerous social practices because they challenge the existing gender order in which more rigid and less forgiving constructions of heteronormative masculinity are firmly entrenched” (Kehler, 2009, p. 215). Thus, many boys and men believe in having to present themselves in terms of a masculine front by “actively constructing and reconstructing a façade of masculinity that publicly affirms heterosexuality through exaggerated rules and norms of masculinity” (Kehler, 2009, p. 203).

Importance of Study

Increased cultural concern with appearance of the body could affect men’s health in a variety of ways. Male adolescents may follow suit to what female adolescents have done in the past, resorting to extreme dieting and exercise in order to maintain a desirable body type. Canadian data has shown that older male adolescents were more likely to indicate that they are on, or should be on a diet to lose weight compared to younger male adolescents. In addition, approximately 20% of male adolescents (ranging from Grade 6 to 10) report changing their eating habits or doing something to actively control their weight (Lee, 2004). The statistic for males remains lower than female adolescents,

perhaps due to a suggested preoccupation with body image for girls and women (Lee, 2004). Nonetheless, this is clearly a growing concern for male adolescents.

However, contrary to female adolescents, males may resort to excessive exercise statistics show that 4% of male adolescents in Grades 9 and 10 have used anabolic steroids, remaining stable since 1998 (Saab, 2004). In a review of literature by Labre (2002), male adolescents who reported using anabolic steroids were fully aware of the benefits of use but often were unaware of the risks or side effects from steroid use. More recent research has found a positive association with stimulant use and body dissatisfaction and bingeing and purging behaviors among Canadian male adolescents (Parkes, Saewyc, Cox, & MacKay, 2008).

In addition to altered behavior, the present study is important as it explores male adolescents' thoughts and feelings regarding their body image. The research that I have uncovered uses quantitative measures of body image. While these studies provide some understanding on the phenomenon of male body image, few qualitative studies have been conducted on male body image. In the qualitative studies that I have encountered (Elliott & Elliott, 2005; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006), boys and men have stated that body image is an issue pertaining to women and girls, but the reasons for this were not explored. It is difficult to predict any general trends at this point because the current literature is sparse and exploratory. Currently, male adolescents may feel that expressing one's body concerns is not "normal" because society expects them to believe that males are supposed to be autonomous, independent, and unemotional (Bosacki, 2005; Kehler, 2009). This belief could lead boys and men to repress their feelings of insecurities with their bodies, leading to alienation or feelings of loneliness. In the end, these feelings of

alienation could have detrimental effects during the adolescent years in terms of a sense of belonging and even peer victimization.

Overview of Study

This study aims to explore the understanding of body image among boys and young men in six male adolescents. Chapter One discussed the contemporary situation of the body image phenomenon, outlining current gaps and the need to address male body image.

Chapter Two is a critical review of the literature on the topic of male body image. Historically, because body image has been mainly focused on women and girls, the few studies that address male body image have been conducted in comparison to female individuals. Lately, there have been studies that specifically address male body image, particularly the belief male adolescents have that body image is a “feminine” or a “gay” issue. Chapter Two is a discussion on the literature on the development of self-concept, gender identity (in childhood and adolescence), and social influences (parents, peers, media) among children. I also discuss previous literature that addresses the link between body image and well-being, particularly its affects on self-esteem and gender identity. Lastly, the chapter explores educational implications and the importance of body image awareness in all school environments.

Chapter Three is the methodology for the present study. I provide an in depth summary of my case study research approach, research design, recruitment, data collection, and assumptions and limitations to the study. Ethical issues that arose in the study are also discussed, including trustworthiness of participants’ responses, confidentiality, and informed consent.

Chapter Four discusses the results of the present study. Coded data, as explained in Chapter Three, were grouped into related themes. From these themes, four general themes of *body image as a status of health*, *body image as an expression of masculinity*, *self-acceptance and self-improvement*, and *body image as an emotional experience* emerged and were discussed in detail. Diagrams were used when necessary, to illustrate the associations between the themes and the theoretical frameworks.

Lastly, Chapter Five is a summary of the main findings and a discussion of what was found. I drew upon the theoretical framework and literature review in providing new insights into the subject of male body image. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the educational and future research implications of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter focuses on psychology literature on male body image. Due to the limited literature available, most past studies often compared body image between male and female individuals. The following literature review examines and summarizes factors that may contribute to the development and maintenance of body image in male adolescents. Several researchers have pointed out that the types of dissatisfaction male adolescents have with their bodies are not merely limited to weight, often citing that muscle mass is also important (Cohane & Pope, 2001; Jones & Crawford, 2005). Regardless of whether male adolescents are concerned with weight, muscle, or both, western society is increasingly seeing more concern over physical appearance (Jones, Bain, & King, 2008; Storvoll, Strandbu, & Wichstrøm, 2005). Despite this growing concern, male adolescents seem to be reluctant to openly discuss their body image issues. Reasons for this finding remain unclear, however researchers have speculated that reluctance to discuss body image concerns may be due to socialization, in particular, a concern for being misinterpreted as “not being masculine” (Cohane & Pope, 2001; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006; Kehler, 2010). To my knowledge, this speculation has not been further investigated.

This critical literature review summarizes present research on male body image. I focus briefly on the comparison between male and female adolescents in terms of the negative affects of body image, linking poor body image to negative outcomes including decreased self-esteem (Labre, 2002) and possible eating disturbances (Verplanken & Velsvik, 2008). Next, I discuss the learned stereotypes of “attractive” versus “unattractive” individuals, including the influence popular culture has on stigmatizing

individuals who are deemed “unattractive”. The concept of gender is discussed in terms of adolescent development, focusing on the importance of adopting gendered identities as a means for young boys to construct and act upon their worldviews of the definitions of masculinity and body image. The proceeding section is a review of the external influences of socialization, focusing on the influences of the media, parents, and peers. This chapter also touches upon educational implications, particularly current school-based prevention programs, noting gaps in the current literature. Lastly, this chapter points out the aims of the present study, and provides a brief summary of the approach that was used in exploring the current study.

Body Image, Self-Esteem, and Gender in Adolescence

Most studies of body image have focused on women and girls. In the few studies that address male body image, it was found that some male adolescents do feel pressure to strive for muscularity, and experience social and self-esteem consequences when muscularity is not achieved. However, compared to females, male adolescents report lower levels of body dissatisfaction (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006; Labre, 2002; Manturuk, 2009; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004). Despite these gender differences, what is clear amongst researchers is the positive correlation between body image and self-esteem (Labre, 2002; Pope & Cohane, 2001), specifically, “both girls and boys who think negatively about their body in a habitual fashion may be at risk for low self-esteem and eating disturbances” (Verplanken & Velsvik, 2008, p. 138). However, there have been mixed findings linking self-esteem and body image among male adolescents. For example, Labre (2002) found that some males experience improved mood and body image as they physically mature and approach adulthood. She and other researchers

(e.g., Rodriguez-Tome, Bariaud, Cohen Zardi, Delmas, Jeanvoine, & Szylagyi, 1993) suggest that this could be due to the physical changes brought about in puberty: male adolescents mature towards society's muscular ideal, including broad shoulder and increased muscle strength.

Reasons for these findings are unclear. On the one hand, a meta-analysis by McCabe and Ricciardelli (2004) found that boys and men had differing needs when it came to achieving the ideal body. Thus, while some individuals strive for losing weight to achieve a slimmer body type, others want to gain weight, for a more muscular body (Cohane & Pope, 2001; Jones & Crawford, 2005). In addition, compared to women, there is a wider range of acceptable body sizes and shapes among men (Cohane & Pope, 2001). It is possible that the wide range of acceptable beauty ideals give male adolescents a choice as to what body type to strive for (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004). Thus, the way body image is developed in boys and young men may not be as simple as weight concern (Jones & Crawford, 2005).

More recent research has examined the longitudinal relationships between muscularity concerns and overall body image. Jones et al. (2008) found that "weight issues have a more negative association with body dissatisfaction than do muscularity concerns" (p. 199). The authors suggest that their findings reflect the "increasing societal attention given to weight as a public health concern and the greater prevalence of obesity among adolescents" (Jones et al., 2008, p. 202). In addition, Jones et al. (2008) believe that weight issues may be prominent in early adolescence while muscularity issues arise much later in pubertal development. Kelley, Neufeld, and Mushner-Eizenman (2010) found that men who had either a high drive for thinness or a high drive for muscularity

had the lowest body esteem compared to males who had both a high drive for thinness and muscularity and males who had a low drive for thinness and muscularity. Thus, researchers continue the notion of focusing on multiple pathways, addressing both weight and muscularity in relation to body dissatisfaction in male adolescents (Jones et al., 2008; Kelley et al., 2010).

In terms of who experiences body dissatisfaction, several studies have found that male adolescents who do not fall within the normalized weight range (i.e., are either underweight or overweight) are more likely to be unhappy with their appearance (Storvoll et al., 2005). As a result, Storvoll et al. (2005) found a greater polarity in body satisfaction, with some male adolescents either reporting greater satisfaction or worse satisfaction with their bodies. In the same cross-sectional study, it was found that male adolescents have become increasingly dissatisfied with their bodies, in particular, their muscle tone, because of the greater focus on men's appearance as portrayed in the media.

More recent research has found the detrimental effects of poor body image. Analyzing data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, Morgan and Rawana (2010, May) found that among younger male adolescents, dissatisfaction with one's appearance was a significant predictor of depression. Furthermore, Rawana (2010, May) found that among younger Canadian adolescents, the desire to lose or gain weight and engaging in behaviors aimed to change weight was related to depressive symptoms regardless of gender. Although these results are preliminary, a relationship between eating- and weight-related disturbances and depression for younger adolescents was suggested (Morgan & Rawana, 2010, May; Rawana, 2010, May).

When asked about their views on body image, adolescent boys admitted that not only is body image a “girl” issue, but also a “gay” issue (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006; Kraymer et al., 2008). These results are not surprising, as men may also believe male models in general are “revolting...gay homosexual porn...cringeworthy” (Elliott & Elliott, 2005, pp. 10–11) and other studies (Martin & Gnoth, 2009) that found men, irrespective of whether men identified as “masculine”, “feminine”, or “androgynous” (p. 18), all men still preferred male models who appeared more masculine. Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2006) further speculate that “some responses [the boys in their study had] indicate that body image concerns are stronger than boys are willing to admit” (p. 573). This and other studies (Cohane & Pope, 2001) have suggested that male adolescents may be reluctant to discuss their appearance because boys may feel embarrassed or sensitive about their appearance. In fact, Cohane and Pope suggest that a response bias may be present, where participants may be providing answers that they feel are socially acceptable, which is that since body image is an issue for girls and women, voicing their opinions on their physical appearance may be a reflection of their lack of masculinity, thus, the socially acceptable response is that body image does not bother them. Thus, the current literature may be underestimating male adolescents’ “true degree of dissatisfaction or unhappiness” (p. 377).

Perceptions of Attractiveness

The culture that one is exposed to certainly has an impact on the individual’s lifestyle choices, including how one presents oneself to others. Moore (2010) stated that adolescence is a particularly crucial time in shaping masculinity in adulthood. With the salience of media in society’s daily routine, it is obvious that masculinity is being

“redefined by appearance and accessories in a media-saturated, consumer-driven society” (Moore, 2010, p. 107). Manhood today is defined by “youth and attractiveness, by money and aggression, by posture and swagger and ‘props,’ by the curled lip and petulant sulk and flexed biceps, by the glamour of the cover boy” (Moore, 2010, p. 81). It is interesting to note that the influences that define masculinity are similar to those of femininity. Thus, the “objectification, passivity, infantilization, pedestal-perching, and mirror-gazing” are the very same definitions that “women have in modern times denounced as trivializing and humiliating qualities imposed on them by a misogynist culture” (Moore, 2010, p. 81).

Hence, body image is undoubtedly a social phenomenon, relying heavily on one’s culture in determining what is deemed attractive or in style. Unsurprisingly, being perceived as physically attractive was found to be associated with greater success in life (Gillen & Lefkowitz, 2009). These findings were consistent across other studies regarding children’s own beliefs about overweight status. In a review of literature by Puhl and Brownell (2001), overweight children believed that they were responsible for their weight problems, and that their weight problems were the reason they were excluded from games and sports and were rejected by their peers. Additionally, it was found that young children hold negative stereotypes of their overweight peers and adults, regardless of the child’s own weight, age, and gender. These negative stereotypes, including the notion that overweight individuals are “lazy, self-indulgent, and even sexually unskilled and unresponsive” (Puhl and Brownell, 2001, p. 796), can carry into adolescence and adulthood. These negative stereotypes toward overweight individuals may be due to the increased interactions between opposite-sex peers during childhood

and adolescent development, as early adolescents tend to commence more opposite-sex friendships and romantic relationships (Boyatzis, Baloff, & Durieux, 1998).

Conversely, when Grogan and Richards (2002) interviewed male adolescents and college-aged men on beliefs of body shape ideals, body esteem, exercise, and diet, it was suggested that regardless of age, all participants in their study believed that being attractive meant being physically fit and being healthy in addition to being physically attractive. Similar results were obtained by Morgan and Arcelus (2009) who found that regardless of sexual orientation, the body ideal among men was more related to being healthy including having lean muscle. In addition, these same individuals believed that being overweight was related to laziness. In fact, they believed that overweight individuals were to “blame for becoming overweight...becoming fat was linked with losing control of the body and with weakness of will” (Grogan & Richards, 2002, p. 226).

Puhl and Brownell (2001) found evidence for prejudice against overweight individuals. While anecdotally, some obese individuals report experiencing prejudice and stigma from their peers, research has shown that children “endorse negative stereotypes for both obese children and adults...regardless of the child’s own weight, age and gender” (Puhl & Brownell, 2001, p. 796). Even among educators, it was found that teachers believed their obese students were more untidy, unemotional, and unsuccessful compared to their non-obese students. Furthermore, these educators believed that being obese “is one of the worst things that could happen to a person” (Puhl & Brownell, 2001, p. 797).

These findings were consistent with past theories of classic social psychological research that found attractive individuals receive more favorable evaluations compared to

unattractive individuals (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). According to the *what is beautiful is good* hypothesis, individuals who are attractive possess more “socially desirable personalities than those of lesser attractiveness, but it is presumed that their lives will be happier and more successful” (Dion et al., p. 289). Why is attractiveness, as a social construct, akin to success or positive characteristics in individuals? Reasons for this social judgment are unclear, however, popular culture seems to reinforce this assumption that all attractive individuals are inherently good while unattractive individuals are assumed to be bad or possess bad character.

Stigma

Goffman (1963) defines stigma as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” (p. 3). According to Goffman, an individual who is stigmatized makes him or her different from other individuals, making the individual less desirable and to an extent, one that is tainted in the minds of others. Stigma has played a huge role in the development of the self, and has been studied among visible minorities, namely within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community. For example, Balsam and Mohr (2007) found that stigmatization of certain groups within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community led to feelings of alienation, in particular, a loss of feelings of belonging, which ultimately could lead to confusion for the individual belonging to a stigmatized group.

Kwan (2010) has suggested the concept of body privilege, where “normal bodies because of size, shape, or appearance, unwittingly avert various forms of social stigma, while simultaneously eliciting social benefits” (p. 147). She found that overweight individuals certainly experience instances of stereotyping, stigma, and social isolation in

doing daily activities, particularly when it comes to clothes shopping. This certainly has an impact on self-esteem, intellectual self-efficacy, and future college and employment opportunities, as Kwan stated that overweight individuals “suffer emotionally and sometimes, quite severely” (p. 152).

Fat stigmatization was studied by Hussin, Frazier, and Thompson (2011) using the popular Internet website, YouTube. In their content analysis, it was found that fat-stigmatizing material was particularly salient in the more popular videos (as defined by the number of times the video was viewed). Among these videos, a majority often targeted Caucasian men, taunted and teased by other Caucasian men. Interestingly, they found that men were twice as likely as women to be victims of fat discrimination in these videos. Such results have been found in previous studies examining fat stigmatization in a content analysis television shows (Himes & Thompson, 2007). What is particularly interesting with the findings from the Himes and Thompson study is that fat stigmatization was often in the form of fat humor; verbal assaults targeted towards a specific individual. To my knowledge, studies such as these have only begun to be explored. More research is needed to further investigate fat stigma present in various forms of social media.

The consequences of stigma are particularly negative for stigmatized individuals. A study by Quinn and Chaudoir (2009) found that individuals who experience stigma are also likely to experience greater psychological distress compared to individuals who do not. While past researchers and theorists (e.g., Goffman, 1963) have investigated visible stigma such as race and sex, Quinn and Chaudoir (2009) focus on concealable stigma, that is, stigma that is not as obvious or salient of the individual. This is equally

detrimental for individuals, as the authors suggest that individuals who conceal their stigmatized identities may not have experienced discrimination from others, but knowing their identities are devalued by others may lead them to “anticipate that others will devalue them if their identities become known” (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009, p. 647), also leading to negative outcomes.

A recent study by Adams and Bukowski (2008) found that physical appearance was related to peer victimization among adolescents. Specifically, peer victimization predicted a higher body-mass index for females and a lower body-mass index in males, more negative feelings towards physical appearance, and depressive symptoms for obese adolescents. It was suggested that victimization may be the result of obesity while simultaneously reinforcing negative body esteem and make it more likely that obese adolescents will be victimized in the future. This cycle of victimization by overweight status has been shown to be significantly related to suicidal behavior (Dave & Rashad, 2009). These results are indicative of a relation between overweight perceptions and depressive symptoms.

Gender and Adolescence

Gender intensification is an increase in gender stereotyped attitudes and behavior. During gender intensification, individuals tend to adopt more traditional gender identities (Berk, 2005). According to Bosacki (2001), “teenagers are expected to act masculine or feminine, and cultural norms about beauty, weight, appearance, and demeanor become rigid” (p. 209). Hill and Lynch (1983) defined the gender intensification hypothesis as gender differences among girls and boys that arise due to the increased pressure to

conform to traditional stereotyped roles. If an adolescent does not conform to this gender intensification, the result can be gender ambivalence.

A study by Galambos, Almeida, and Petersen (1990) found that gender intensification was particularly prominent in early adolescence, and among male rather than among female adolescents. They found that male adolescents became increasingly rigid in their masculine beliefs and stereotypes with increasing age. Crouter, Manke, and McHale (1995) replicated the results by Galambos et al. (1990), where gender intensification increased with increasing age. In addition, Crouter et al. (1995) found this relationship to be even more pronounced if parents had more traditional gender beliefs. For example, it was found that more traditional parents were more likely to assign gender-typical house chores to their children. One crucial limitation to this study however was that the authors failed to measure gender intensification in terms of emerging sexuality in adolescence.

More recent research has found no evidence for the gender intensification hypothesis. Preiss, Lindberg, and Hyde (2009) examined the notion of gender-role identities in adolescents. Their longitudinal study sought to answer whether there is a divergence of gender-role identities between boys and girls and whether gender identity accounts for gender differences in depressive symptoms. Rather than finding gender intensification, it was found that masculinity alone predicted depressive symptoms but not the gender differences in depressive symptoms. This suggests that adopting a masculine identity is more encouraged for girls but that adopting a feminine identity for boys is discouraged. Mahalik and Cournoyer (2000) similarly found that certain traits associated with masculinity differed between depressed and non-depressed young men.

Specifically, they found that individuals with gender role conflict (i.e., those who tended to hold rigid beliefs of masculinity) correlated with depressive symptoms.

Body Image and Gender

With the prior notion that male adolescents often believe body image is akin to feminine behavior, a few studies have examined whether this gender stereotype is true. Thomas, Ricciardelli, and Williams (2000) examined the relationship between gender-typical traits and self-concept in predicting body dissatisfaction and disturbed eating behaviors in preadolescent boys. They found that a high identity with femininity predicted a high chance of problem eating. In this study, femininity was determined by a psychometric measure of gender identity (Children's Sex Role Inventory, adapted from the Bem Sex Role Inventory). Specifically, male adolescents who identified highly with femininity were more likely to diet and have a higher preoccupation with food as opposed to adolescent males who did not identify with femininity. Therefore, the male adolescents who identified themselves as feminine tended to seek approval from others, ergo, increasing their sensitivity to their own physical appearance and ultimately, increasing susceptibility to problem eating.

A study by Forbes, Adams-Curtis, Rade, and Jaberg (2001) found similar results to those of Thomas et al. (2000). They examined the relation between gender type (masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated) and self-perceptions of body image among college-aged men and women. While they did not find a link between gender type and an individual's perceptions of body image, they did find that gender type was related to body satisfaction. Specifically, they found that men who identified as a feminine gender type were more likely to report higher levels of body dissatisfaction

compared to males who identify as masculine or androgynous. In addition, individuals who identified as feminine or undifferentiated were more likely than masculine or androgynous individuals to report a higher discrepancy between their ideal body type and actual body type. This is unsurprising, as Atkinson and Kehler (2010) state that “boys who are deemed too fat, too thin, or generally not as physically capable as the dominant boys are labeled as feminine or their sexuality is questioned” (p. 76).

In a recent meta-analysis by Blashill (2011), it was found that the presence of feminine traits alone had no significant association to disordered eating, body dissatisfaction, or muscle dissatisfaction. It was found that sexual orientation mediated the relationship such that feminine traits were negatively associated with muscle dissatisfaction among heterosexual men. The lack of relationship between gender identity and disordered eating and body dissatisfaction found in this meta-analysis contradicts past studies (e.g., Forbes et al., 2001; Thomas et al., 2000) supporting the femininity hypothesis.

Social-Cultural Influences

The following section outlines research on the socio-cultural influences that may have an influence on notions of masculine identity and physical appearance including popular culture, parental influence, and peers.

Popular Culture

The media has undoubtedly had an impact on and is reflective of the culture it is engrossed in. Research by Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2009) examined social comparison processes of college-aged men after viewing muscular-ideal male beauty, as defined in this study as men having “well-built, tanned, and toned upper bodies...also

bare-chested for all or part of the commercials” (p. 111). It was found that men who were exposed to muscular-ideal media reported higher levels of muscular dissatisfaction than men who viewed nonappearance media (defined by male models who were mostly clothed, focusing less on their bodies).

However, other research (Diedrichs & Lee, 2010) suggests the relationship between media and body image is more complex. In their study, it was found that men reported an increase in body image satisfaction after being exposed to average-sized male models compared to men who were not exposed to male models. The opposite effect (increased body dissatisfaction) was not found among men who were exposed to muscular male models. Among male adolescents, a study conducted by Ricciardelli, McCabe, and Banfield (2000) found that male adolescents do not feel that the media affects their feelings about their bodies, eating, or exercise behaviors.

Popular culture can be thought of as a medium, portraying what is normative of a given society. Therefore, what is perceived as socially acceptable in that given society is conveyed through popular culture (e.g., music, movies, fashion magazines, and fairy tales). Baker-Sperry (2007) conducted a study in which boys and girls were given the opportunity to present their views on the fairy tale *Cinderella*, produced by Disney. While Baker-Sperry (2007) found that boys tended to deviate from discussing issues that arise in *Cinderella*, it was suggested that the boys in the study “demonstrated resistance to the messages in the tale and reinforced group acceptance of normative masculinity” (p. 726). This was clearly illustrated by the boys who proclaimed that *Cinderella* was a feminine tale and did not pertain to them, as they were masculine. As Baker-Sperry (2007) notes, the fact that these boys showed outright disinterest in the fairy tale because

it is feminine suggests the strong gendered stereotypes present in these fairy tales. As a result, these boys feel that the underlying moral or life lesson of a given fairy tale may not be applicable to their immediate lives. Given that the original intent of story telling was to convey social morals, perhaps boys may feel that they are exempt from such morals.

Interestingly, males tend to “maintain strong gender boundaries in opposition to anything associated with girls or femininity” (Blakemore et al., 2009, p. 341) in terms of the types of books or television shows that they consume. According to Lips (1997), this is unsurprising, as parents and non-parents are more likely to purchase gender-stereotype toys for boys than for girls. As a result, the more children are exposed to media, the more likely they may be to hold gender-stereotyped attitudes.

Parent influence

Where and how are gender-roles learned and how are they reinforced in the lives of adolescents? In a recent study by Crespo, Kielpikowski, Jose, and Pryor (2010), the relationship between family connectedness and body satisfaction was examined longitudinally. In this study, it was found that adolescents, regardless of gender, reported feeling less connected to their family over time. However, it was found that higher perceived family connectedness predicted higher body satisfaction over time for females but not for males. It was suggested that a strong family connection could act as a buffer, especially during adolescence where social acceptance is of importance to individuals. This is especially more pronounced in females than for male adolescents. The lack of findings for male adolescents in this study suggests further research into this specific issue, as more recent longitudinal studies found that parental encouragement to control

weight (which were thought to be supportive) was a strong predictor of weight concern for both male and female adolescents and negative comments (e.g., teasing from parents) were irrelevant to weight concern (Helfert & Warschburger, 2011).

Ricciardelli et al. (2000) found that for male adolescents, positive feedback and encouragement from their mothers were influential in determining their body satisfaction and that their fathers and male friends affected the ways in which they attain a muscular ideal. For example, boys reported that their fathers were influential in affecting their eating patterns while fathers, brothers, and other male friends were influential on these boys' exercise patterns. More recent research by Rodgers, Faure, and Charbrol (2009) found similar results in that comments from fathers were the most significant predictor of body dissatisfaction for male adolescents but that negative comments from their mothers predicted boys' drive for thinness. Rodgers et al. (2009) suggested that "it may be that weight-loss is a more female-related trait as opposed to other body shape modifying behaviors that are more male-oriented" (p. 845).

Peer influence

Other sources of influence seem to stem from peers. Jones, Vigfusdottir, and Lee (2004) found that regardless of gender, adolescents who reported engaging in more frequent conversations about their appearance with peers were more likely to "endorse greater internalization that, in turn, was related to greater feelings of dissatisfaction with one's body" (p. 335). Furthermore, it was found that especially among male adolescents, peer criticisms on their appearance is important in contributing to internalization and body image satisfaction. It is also peer criticisms that were the strongest predictor of body image among the boys in their study.

Similar results were obtained by Helfert and Warschburger (2011). In this study, male and female adolescents completed measures of body satisfaction and appearance-related social pressure from both parents and peers over a one-year period. It was found that peer influence affected gender-specific body image concerns, namely thinness among females and muscularity among males. Both studies by Jones et al. (2004) and Helfert and Warschburger (2011) suggest that as a result of increased exposure to peers during adolescence, appearance ideals and standards are more likely to be expressed among peer discussions and interactions.

Other researchers agree on the notion of peer acceptance. A grounded theory study by Kraye et al. (2008) found that adolescents were more likely to be heavily influenced by their peers in terms of comparing oneself to a particular physical beauty ideal. It was suggested that during adolescence, peers become influential through the creation of, sharing, and understanding of youth opinions. According to Ata and Ludden (2007), “when adolescents perceive these pressures from the people who are closest to them—their family and friends—they may become more distressed, feel negatively about themselves, diet, and engage in other negative eating behaviors such as bingeing and purging” (p. 1033).

Educational Implications

Classroom dynamics undoubtedly have an impact on overall health (mental and physical) and well being of the students involved. Bosacki (2005) suggested that an adolescent’s sense of self is dependent upon peer and teacher interactions. It is in these interactions where children learn social roles, including what gender defines as a “performative act that represents multiple and shifting selves” (Bosacki, 2005, p. 10).

Bosacki discussed the notion of structural silence, in which society's rules dictate what and when an individual should speak or be silent. This type of silence can "drive some people to a defensive stance of silence and passivity that stem from feelings of fear and threat" (Bosacki, 2005, p. 12). That is, structural silence can occur when teachers do not expect boys to enact gender-specific behaviors in what type of emotions to display.

Bosacki (2005) suggested that silence in the classroom "may create a mainly negative emotional reaction such as increased self-consciousness and possible anxiety" (p. 15). She noted that silence "can be used to avoid the threats to relationships that could result from the voicing of unacceptable thoughts and emotions" (Bosacki, 2005, p. 7). This is imperative in the school where the school as a culture can reinforce the development of certain aspects of voice and self-identity.

As a result of these school culture expectations, male adolescents "have a clear understanding of the rules of engagement with other boys" (Kehler, 2009, p. 211). Knowing these rules, Kehler (2009) suggests, leads to a façade that boys present. This façade serves as a buffer for high school boys, as it is important to act appropriately in front of peers. Gender appropriate ways of acting include wanting to be or appear to be the strongest and tallest in terms of physical strength and athletic ability (Messerschmidt, 2010). As a result, male adolescents who not meet the status quo of masculine behavior, as determined by peers, may be subject to bullying and/or being ostracized by their peers (Lingard, Martino, & Mills, 2009; Messerschmidt, 2010).

School-based Intervention Programs

Due to the growing concern of health and health-related problems among youth, educators and researchers have developed and implemented health prevention programs

in Canadian schools, developed for a wide variety of age groups. According to McVey et al. (2007), these prevention programs aim for two things: In the short-term, to increase resiliency and decrease risk factors, and in the long-term, the short-term changes will result in fewer eating- and dieting-related problems, including fewer instances of eating disorders.

Recent school-based prevention programs (McCabe et al., 2010; McVey et al., 2007; Richardson et al., 2009; Wilksch et al., 2006) contain four elements common to each program: critical media literacy, self-esteem development, promotion of a healthy lifestyle, and developing healthy interpersonal relationships. According to McVey et al. (2007), it is imperative for prevention programs to incorporate a wide variety of influences that could potentially affect body image satisfaction in children and adolescents. A content analysis of these studies (Lao & Bosacki, 2010, November) revealed mixed results in the effectiveness of school-based prevention programs. Table 1 summarizes the results of the content analysis, including the elements common to all studies and the study's effectiveness.

Results from this content analysis support the need for gender inclusive intervention programs. This is further highlighted by the study by McVey et al. (2007), in which their adolescent male participants expressed an interest in having school-based

Table 1

Summary of Recent Body Image Prevention Programs for Adolescents and Young Adults

	Media literacy	Self-esteem development	Healthy lifestyle	Relationship development	Notes
McCabe et al. (2010) (Australia)		Promoting individual differences and emphasis on internal characteristics rather than physical appearance	Coping skills directed towards dealing with stress and negative affect	Communication and social skill development, seeing things from the “other” perspective	Did not improve body satisfaction or self-esteem, both immediately and at 6-month follow up
McVey et al. (2010) (Canada)	Critical analyses of representations of beauty in the media	Promoting the acceptance of various body shapes and sizes, ways to promote self-esteem and body image	Develop and maintain healthy eating and living practices, stress management techniques	Promotes assertive modes of communication, promotes healthy relationships and problem-solving strategies for issues relating to relationships	Increased body satisfaction and decreased internalization of the thin ideal immediately. Lack of follow up was conducted. Participants were mostly female (6 male participants)

Richardson et al. (2009) (Australia)	Class discussions on the portrayal of unrealistic images in the media	Class discussions on body image and self-esteem, ways to enhance body image and self-esteem	Develop and understanding of others; coping strategies when being teased by peers	No increase in body satisfaction or a change in disordered eating among the boys in this sample
Wilksch et al. (2006) (Australia)	Critical analyses of stereotypes depicted in the media, particularly advertisements (healthy vs. unhealthy); pressures from the media; consumer activism	Role-play on how to cope with negative comments; coping strategies for pressures placed by peers and family	Examining peer and family relationship pressures	Emphasis on depiction of women in the media. Boys in this sample had more improved body satisfaction compared to the girls in study

Note. From "School-based body image prevention programs for males." by M.G. Lao and S. Bosacki, 2010. Poster presented at *Breaking the Mold, Breaking the Silence: A National Conference on Body Image*, November 4-5, 2010, Halifax, NS. Copyright 2010 by M.G. Lao. Reprinted with permission.

programs designed specifically for boys. To my knowledge, there remains a lack of evaluative research on school-based prevention programs designed for Canadian boys and adolescent males. In one program that was designed for boys (McCabe et al., 2010), a program that specifically focuses on self-esteem development and the promotion of healthy interpersonal relationships rather than addressing critical media literacy, there was no immediate decrease in body satisfaction after the program, nor was there a change in body satisfaction six months after. The lack of findings in these studies suggests an ongoing need to implement and revise such education programs.

The inclusion of critical media literacy into these programs is important, as social development is undoubtedly an important aspect of growing up in this culture. Henry Giroux has been pivotal in the development of popular culture as an academic concern. In terms of critical pedagogy, Giroux (1994) states that:

The “knowledge” that informs such resistance is viewed as an invitation for teachers and other cultural workers to make the students’ desires, experiences, and stories an integral aspect of our teaching. But the call to bring the themes and texts of students’ everyday lives into the classroom demands more than affirming and problematizing student resistance; it also means reordering the curriculum to allow the force and affective energy of other kinds of “texts,” including films, videos, and music, to combine with the critical activity often allotted to written texts. (p. 121)

Popular culture can be used as a tool in critical pedagogy to provide students an opportunity to understand the social world and to incorporate it into their daily lives (Alverman & Hagood, 2000; Giroux & Simon, 1989). Since the notion of popular

culture is historically bound, Giroux and Simon (1989) suggest that the effects of popular culture are affective, and that practices pertaining to popular culture are never exclusively ideological, but a combination of both ideology and affect. Alverman and Hagood (2000) further emphasize that incorporating the outside world into the classroom helps students “fill out needed frames of reference for questioning some accepted ways of doing things that often lead to social injustices and inequalities” (p. 197). Thus, in order to break down popular culture, one must not only deconstruct the ideologies that underlie popular culture, but to also to incorporate it into one’s own meanings and experiences.

Summary of Literature

The preceding chapter was a literature review of male body image. According to the literature, male adolescents do not suffer from body dissatisfaction to the same extent as female adolescents (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004; Labre, 2002; Manturuk, 2009; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004). Several researchers have pointed out that the types of dissatisfaction boys have with their bodies are not merely limited to weight, often citing that muscle mass is important for boys as well (Cohane & Pope, 2001; Jones & Crawford, 2005). Despite this, it is clear that boys are concerned with their physical appearance (Jones et al., 2008; Storvoll et al., 2005) and this concern has been linked to low self-esteem (Labre, 2002; Pope & Cohane, 2001; Verplanken & Velsvik, 2008). An interesting finding in the literature has been that adolescent males seem to be reluctant to openly discuss their body image issues (Cohane & Pope, 2001; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006; Kraye et al., 2008). Reasons are unclear, but male adolescents’ reactions to body image seem to be consistent to those of adult men who declare that

body image is a “feminine” or a “gay” issue (Elliott & Elliott, 2005; Morgan & Arcelus, 2009).

Studies on perceptions of attractiveness have found that male adolescents tend to associate physical attractiveness to success in life (Gillen & Lefkowitz, 2009) and being healthy whilst being overweight or obese is akin to laziness (Grogan & Richards, 2002). Furthermore, overweight children often believe that their weight problems are the reasons behind their exclusion from their peers (Puhl & Brownell, 2001), and can lead to a cycle of victimization (Adams & Bukowski, 2008) and suicidal behavior among adolescents (Dave & Rashad, 2009).

Even from a young age, children are constantly learning the roles and expectations of their assigned sex. During adolescence, both boys and girls develop more rigid beliefs about their gender roles and expectations. This gender-role intensification pressures adolescents to conform to more traditional stereotyped roles (Galambos et al., 1990; Hill & Lynch, 1983). Gender-role intensification seems to occur more among boys, during early adolescence, where boys become increasingly rigid in their masculine beliefs (Galambos et al., 1990). However, more recent research has found no evidence for gender-role intensification, but found that masculinity was related to depressive symptoms in adolescence (Preiss et al., 2009) and in adulthood (Mahalik & Cournoyer, 2000).

The notion of gender expectations have been shown to be linked to body satisfaction and eating behavior in preadolescent boys (Forbes et al., 2001; Thomas et al., 2000) by way of stigmatizing certain groups of individuals (Hussin et al., 2011; Puhl & Brownell, 2001). That is, preadolescent boys who identify with femininity were more

likely to report greater body dissatisfaction and problematic eating—a finding ubiquitous with females. According to Goffman (1963), stigma is the result of an individual's identity or characteristics deviating from the norm as defined by the society they are in. As a result, the stigmatized individual is less desirable in the eyes of others. Stigmas, both visible and invisible, have been shown to have an impact on psychological health and well-being of the stigmatized individuals (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009; Walton & Cohen, 2007).

Social-cultural influences such as popular culture certainly have an impact on what society deems physically attractive, as was found in studies in which some males are affected by being exposed to images of other men (Diedrichs & Lee, 2010; Hargreaves & Tiggeman, 2009). Other influences include parents and peers. Male adolescents report that parents have a big influence on their eating habits and exercise (Ricciardelli et al., 2000; Rodger et al., 2009) while engaging in frequent conversations with peers, particularly peer criticism is an important contributor to body image satisfaction (Jones et al., 2004; Kraye et al., 2008). Both parents and peers may be an adolescent's biggest influence since these people are closest and therefore, more important in the adolescent's life. As such, any negative comments regarding physical appearance may result in the adolescent feeling negatively about themselves (Ata & Ludden, 2007).

Lastly, classroom dynamics have a huge impact on the well-being of its students. The classroom environment can certainly effect who is free to express their emotions and those who are left voiceless (Bosacki, 2005). This silence “may create a mainly negative emotional reaction such as increased self-consciousness and possible anxiety” (Bosacki,

2005, p. 15). The classroom environment can also lead to expectations for which certain individuals should act (Kehler, 2009), where those who do not act within the status quo may risk being bullied, demeaned, and/or ostracized by peers (Lingard et al., 2009). Lastly, the classroom can create an environment that may be threatening to overweight individuals, where peers and educators alike have been shown to display prejudice towards to their overweight students (Puhl & Brownell, 2001). Implementing a school-based prevention program can have potential positive affects in aiding children critique the media that they are exposed to on a daily basis.

Although there has been research examining male adolescents' experiences with body image, the research thus far has only speculated reasons for the differences in experience compared to female adolescents. Despite a relation between body dissatisfaction and depression (Morgan & Rawana, 2010, May), research needs to further investigate why some male adolescents, others may be reluctant to openly discuss body image (Cohane & Pope, 2001; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006). Reasons for why some males are reluctant to discuss their body image concerns have been speculated, but not yet investigated.

Present Study

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the perceptions of body image in six male adolescents. Particularly, I investigate perceptions of their body image concerns from a qualitative perspective. To my knowledge, at the time of writing, there have been few qualitative research studies seeking to explore why male adolescents are reluctant to talk about their body image concerns, nor are there studies that examine where and how this reluctance is learned. In addition, I explore male adolescents' thoughts on why they

are raised to believe that certain attitudes and beliefs are labeled as masculine or feminine.

A second purpose to the present study is to examine ways in which educators can address body image concerns among adolescents. To my knowledge, within the psychoeducational literature, this notion of the development of a holistic, gender inclusive and developmentally appropriate educational program and strategies has not been pursued for male adolescents. Thus, this gap in the literature suggests the need for curriculum development and may possibly help contribute to the stigmatization of body image and unattractive or overweight individuals in the classroom. As the literature states, the classroom context may have a lasting impact on a student's well-being, motivation to learn, and ultimately, their identity and self-concept.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The following chapter outlines how the present study was conducted. As stated in Chapter One, this study sought to explore the thoughts and feelings of six male adolescents regarding their body image. My research questions are as follows:

1. What are these male adolescents' perceptions of their own body image? How did they learn this?
2. Do these male adolescents believe that body image is a "feminine" or "gay" issue? Why or why not?
3. What are these male adolescents' experiences in discussing their body image issues?
4. When do these male adolescents' feel it is appropriate to discuss their body concerns?

To explore these research questions, I used a case study approach to conduct semi-structured interviews with male adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 living in Southern Ontario. Data collection consisted of one-on-one interviews and self-reflective fieldnotes. Interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed for further analysis.

Data analysis includes finding generalizations and themes from the interviews.

Assumptions, limitations, and ethical issues in the present study are also discussed.

Research Approach

The present study explored male adolescents' perceptions and attitudes regarding their body image. Because there are few studies that address boys' perceptions of body image, I chose to conduct the study from an interpretivist point of view. An interpretivist approach views the experiences of individuals as unique. Hence, my purpose for the

present study was to try to understand the complexities of an individual's construction of reality (Schram, 2003). I sought to understand the experiences of males with regards to body image, as I believe that each individual's experience is unique. Due to the exploratory nature of my research questions and my interpretivist worldview, I decided that a qualitative research approach was most appropriate. According to Schram (2003), qualitative research aims to construct "multiple meanings and voices... synthesizing these multi-voiced and varied constructions requires that [the researcher] engage[s] at some level in the lives of those around whom [the] inquiry is focused" (pp. 33–34). Both the complex nature of body image and the scarcity of existing theories on male body image made approaching this issue difficult from a quantitative perspective.

The research focused on adolescent boys' perceptions of body image, experiences in dealing with body image issues, self-esteem, gender stereotypes, social influences, and their opinions on how body image is currently addressed by educators. For this study, I chose to apply a case study research approach. According to Berg (2001), case studies seek to fully understand an individual or group of individuals in a particular social setting or event. Namely, "description and explanation... are sought, when it is not possible or feasible to manipulate the potential causes of behavior, and when variables are not easily identified or are too embedded in the phenomenon to be extracted for study" (Merriam, 1988, p. 7). Researchers who use a case study methodology utilize various data collection techniques in order to understand the perspectives and experiences of the individual(s) of interest (Berg, 2001). Merriam (1998, pp. 11–13) describes case studies as:

Pluralistic. Case studies focus on a specific situation, event, program, or phenomenon.

Descriptive. Case studies provide an in depth description of the phenomenon of interest.

Heuristic. Case studies further the reader's understanding of a particular situation or phenomenon.

Inductive. Case studies provide general concepts or hypotheses from carefully examining the data.

My purpose for choosing a case study approach is due to the nature of my research questions, as I wanted to understand body image issues in male adolescents. I anticipated that the present study could raise awareness in an under-researched field.

Research Design

In designing the present study, I chose to do a descriptive case study design. A descriptive case study is one in which the “investigator present[s] a descriptive theory, which establishes the overall framework for the investigator to follow throughout the study” (Berg, 2001, p. 230). The theoretical framework outlined in Chapter One formed a theoretical basis from which my research questions were created. Berg (2001, p. 230) outlines five basic components that entail this research design process:

1. The study's questions
2. The study's propositions or theoretical framework
3. Identifying the study's unit of analysis
4. The linking of data to the propositions or theory
5. Interpreting the findings based on the data.

I outlined the purpose of the present study by stating my research questions. In addition, I also outlined the theoretical framework that I am using for the present study as a basis of explanation for the possible influences on body image issues in male adolescents. The study's propositions direct "attention to something that should be examined within the scope of the study" (Yin, 2003, p. 22). In the present study, I used the notions of identity development, gender identity, and hegemonic masculinity as the focus.

The case study research approach emphasizes the use of multiple methods of data collection in order to gain an in depth understanding of the phenomenon from different perspectives (Yin, 2003). In addition to the verbal interviews, my own self-reflections were incorporated as fieldnotes, noting my own thoughts, feelings, and experiences during the research process.

Selection of Participants

Expanding more on Yin's (2003) definition of the unit of analysis, it was imperative that I define what the case in the present study is. Participants in the present study were six male adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 in Southern Ontario. Participants were recruited by snowball method. According to Creswell (2008), snowball method entails recruiting participants by asking participants if they knew of other individuals who may be interested in participating in the study. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, the snowball sampling approach was used such that potential participants (and their parents) could approach me without having any other individuals know that they were interested in participating.

Upon university ethics clearance (Appendix A), I sent out e-mails to friends and colleagues, outlining the purpose of the study. Friends and colleagues were asked to forward the e-mail and my contact details to parents and male adolescents who may be interested in participating. Parents of potential participants were instructed to contact me by e-mail or by telephone if they were interested in further information or in participating. Because of the age of the participants, both parental consent and participant assent were obtained, to ensure that both parties were well informed of the purposes of the study and any benefits or risks that may arise from participation in the study. The informed consent outlined the purpose of the present study, any risks or benefits that may be involved in participating in the study, how the data was handled by the researcher, including that the information shared will remain confidential between the researcher and the participant. Both the participants and their parents were free to discuss any concerns or questions they had with me before and after the interview. A copy of the interview schedule (Appendix B) was also provided to participants and their parents. Due to the nature of the topic, I felt it was best to provide a brief overview of the purpose of the study and how I planned to collect data. This allowed the participant and their parents to decide prior to the interview whether they are comfortable proceeding with the interview.

Data Collection

Data collected were one-on-one interviews and behavioral observations of the participants. The present study used multiple sites throughout Southern Ontario, as decided upon by participants and their parents prior to the interview. The following

section provides an in-depth description of the processes involved in collecting data, including interview format, the transcription process, and self-reflective fieldnotes.

Interview Format

The present study consisted of open-ended questions with a semi-structured interview format. Using open-ended questions allow the researcher to control the type of information that is collected. Moreover, researchers need to be careful in that open-ended questions may lead to unclear responses from participants or response bias (Creswell, 2008). Regardless of the disadvantages, I maintained open-ended questions because of the nature of case studies: I was interested in exploring the topic of body image in depth and would not have been able to do so if closed-ended questions were used.

According to Fontana and Frey (2005), a structured interview “proceeds under a stimulus-response format, assuming that the respondent will truthfully answer questions previously determined to reveal adequate indicators of the variable in question” (p. 703). In addition, Fontana and Frey (2005) suggest that the structured interview format may even overlook the emotional aspects of data collection. Conversely, unstructured interviews seek to gain an understanding of the complexities of human behavior with no prior categorization of behavior. A semi-structured interview format was most appropriate for my given study. Semi-structured interviews contain within them a set interview guide that outlines what will be asked during an interview. It also provided me an opportunity to ask follow-up questions based on the participants’ responses, to further clarify or elaborate on an issue that arose.

Interviews were conducted one-on-one with each participant. One-on-one interviews are ideal for participants who are not hesitant to speak, are open to sharing their opinions and ideas, and are more articulate (Creswell, 2008). My rationale for individual interviews is that the use of focus groups may provide a psychologically unsafe environment for the participants, especially since the focus groups would consist of their same-sex peers. This unsafe environment may cause participants to hold back on their actual thoughts and feelings about their body image issues or result in a consensus within the group rather than capturing individual thoughts and feelings on body image. Individual interviews may have been intimidating for my participants; however, I believe because of the sensitive nature of my research, private, individual interviews helped create an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality for my participants. I tried to establish an atmosphere of trust by trying to get to know each participant, asking them about their school subjects, their daily activities, and their university and career aspirations. I stressed the importance of confidentiality prior to, during, and after the interview. All participants understood and were aware that the interviews would not be shared with others, including their parents.

Transcription Process

Interviews were audio recorded using a digital audio recorder and then transcribed, along with the observation notes, using Dragon Naturally Speaking Speech Recognition Software (Version 11, Premium edition) and a word processing program on a Windows-based computer operating system. Transcribing the recorded interviews consisted of my listening to the interview and verbally dictating the interview into a microphone connected to my desktop computer. Dragon Naturally Speaking 11 then

dictated what I said onto a word processing program on my computer. After initial transcription, I read through the transcribed data, inserting pauses, laughter, interruptions, and other hesitations.

According to O'Connell and Kowal (1999), what is transcribed is only a representation of the recorded data, which in turn is a representation of the original data, thus, it "cannot incrementally approximate the experience of the original participants" (p. 111). In the transcription process, proper punctuation was used, to ensure that redundancy in the data was minimized. I excluded repeated words, utterances and prosodic information in the interview transcript so that when I provided my participant with the transcript for member checking, he would not feel overwhelmed or confused by the repeated words or utterances. I included long pauses, as defined by Tilley and Powick (2001) as silence longer than five seconds, as I believe that the pauses could have significance in the findings.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

It is important that in qualitative studies, certain measures are taken to establish the credibility and trustworthiness of the data collected. Creswell (2008) defines trustworthiness as a validation and accuracy of findings that can be done through member checking. Member checking is a method in which the participant examines the data to confirm reliability and validity of what is transcribed. After transcription, I provided the participants the opportunity to review the transcript of the interview. Member checking allows the participant to review what was recorded during the interview as well as confirm that what was interpreted by the researcher was a valid representation of what the individual conveys during the interview (Creswell, 2008). At this time, participants had

the opportunity to review what was said during the interview and also to ensure that I appropriately represented and interpreted what they meant to convey. The participants could edit, add or choose to withdraw parts of the interview that they felt uncomfortable with sharing in the final project. Participants were given the option of either being provided with a hard copy of the interview transcript sealed in an envelope and hand delivered to them, or sent an electronic copy by e-mail with a password-protected attachment file. All participants opted for the electronic copy. Overall, all participants in the study were satisfied with the transcribed interviews. Participants who made changes to the transcript, made only minor changes.

Self-Reflection as an Outsider and Insider to the Phenomenon

This study was based on my past academic and research interests within the field of body image. I wanted to integrate my interests in psychology, popular culture, and education, as well as my own adolescent and adult experiences in dealing with issues of physical appearances and the ramifications of striving for an oftentimes unrealistic beauty ideal. I am in many ways, an outsider looking into the phenomenon of body image, both in biological sex, gender identity, and age cohort. As an outsider, I do not know the experiences of male adolescents; therefore, it was important that I not impose my own beliefs when conducting the interviews. However, I also consider myself an insider, once having been an adolescent with body image issues; I may also have similar experiences as the participants in the study. Having grown up in the Greater Toronto Area, I am familiar with the local culture and being a younger researcher, I can also relate to the youth culture.

Both my status as an outsider and insider to my research, and the experiences that have led to my status have undoubtedly affected the way the findings of this study are interpreted. According to Fontana and Frey (2005), the interview process is “inextricably and unavoidably historically, politically, and contextually bound” (p. 695). Right away, it can be assumed that interviewing, as a means of gathering data, will be laden with biases, thus, refuting the notion of objectivity in research. Because of my prior knowledge of body image (from both research and with working with individuals who suffer from body image issues and disordered eating), it was important to note these biases I had prior to commencement of this study, as these experiences may have affected the study with regards to my opinions, body language, and other non-verbal cues may have shaped my selection of questions and the way I asked these questions.

When analyzing the data, I took into account my subjectivity in the issues of body image. Thus, in addition to conducting interviews, fieldnotes were taken as a self-reflection during the research process. According to Creswell (2008), reflective fieldnotes capture the interviewer’s personal thoughts, hunches, and broad ideas or themes that may have arisen during the interview. My self-reflections were recorded immediately after the interviews, as not to disrupt the flow of the interview.

I was aware that partaking in this project would be difficult, particularly because I am a young woman interviewing male adolescents about their bodies. When I explain to people what my research interests are, I am often met with surprise and some bewilderment. The first question I am always asked is “Why male adolescents?” or “What made you decide to study this topic?” perhaps wondering why I, as a young woman, would be interested in learning about male body image. Exploring such a topic I

anticipated would have some resistance, either by means of recruitment of participants or during data collection. Constantly reflecting back on my interview experience allowed me to revise the way I approached this issue before, during, and after I interviewed each participant.

Procedure

Interviews were conducted at a time and place that was convenient for the participant, and agreed upon and pre-arranged by a parent or guardian. Interviews took place in the participant's home or workplace, in a room separate from other individuals to ensure confidentiality in data collection. Parental consent and participant assent forms were obtained at the time of the interview, after a brief discussion of the study, outlining what was to be expected during the interview. Once the participant gave full consent, the interview was audio recorded. The interview sessions took approximately 10 to 15 minutes for each participant. Once the interview was complete, participants were thanked and debriefed (Appendix C). At the time of debriefing, resources and information about body image were made available to those interested. Lastly, a small honorarium was given to participants, as a thank you for participating in the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done by hand, highlighting and grouping the transcribed data into codes. Hand analysis entails researchers reading through the data, coding by hand and organizing it into its subsequent themes (Creswell, 2008). Hand analysis was ideal for this study, as I was dealing with a small database. The following section outlines the coding process that was used in the present study. I used a combination of both a priori and iterative codes in all data. In turn, those codes were reorganized into categories or

general themes with the use of colored pens, highlighters, and sticky notes. It is these themes and generalization that I used in the analysis and interpretations of results. Notable quotations in the interview transcripts were highlighted, to further illustrate general themes in my findings.

Coding

In creating categories for my data, I used the technique outlined by Conastas (1992). Conastas (1992) outlines three components of categorization: *origination*, *verification*, and *nomination*. Origination refers to identifying the way in which categories are constructed. Due to my prior experience in researching body image issues and the prior literature I have read, I had a basic premise of the type of data that was of interest to me. In this regard, Conastas (1992) states that “researchers who attempt to build on discoveries of research conducted in situations and on topics similar to the ones they are investigating may refer to research or published works in the relevant area” (p. 258). Verification refers to a strategy that “support[s] the creation and application of categories used in a given study” (p. 259). Conastas (1992) describes sources in which researchers can verify their created categories. The strategy I used is called referential strategy. In this strategy, I used existing research findings to verify or justify the categories that I created. Lastly, Conastas (1992) describes the notion of nomination, in which the researcher describes or names the categories that they identified. According to Conastas (1992), the name of a category should elicit “a certain power and establishes a real or illusory impression of knowledge and certainty” (p. 260).

In this study, I incorporated Conastas’s (1992) use of origination and verification to create a list of a priori codes. These codes were based on the theoretical framework

and review of literature of this thesis (Appendix D) and were defined prior to data collection. In addition to my a priori codes, there were issues or themes that arose that I did not initially anticipate. Hence, these codes that do not fit into my a priori codes were made into iterative codes. According to Conastas (1992), iterative categories are “created at various points in time during the research process” (p. 261). The codes were assigned to highlighted text of each transcript.

Themes and Generalizations

Once coding was complete, codes were aggregated to form a theme or generalization of the data. From the data, three types of themes emerged: ordinary, unexpected, and hard to classify (Creswell, 2008). Ordinary themes are themes that the researcher expected to find, unexpected themes are themes that were not expected to arise from the data, and hard-to-classify themes were themes that overlapped with other themes (Creswell, 2008). The themes that emerged from my aggregated codes were used for analysis and interpretation, and eventually, providing an in-depth answer to my research questions.

Methodological Limitations and Assumptions

Firstly, it is important to note that in the present study, I interviewed male adolescents aged 13 to 18. While one of the purposes of the study was to explore if there were any themes or issues that remained salient or changed throughout adolescence, I could not conclude the existence of any developmental trends, as each individual participant was exposed to different experiences that contribute to their perceptions of body image. Secondly, the data is only representative of the sample of male adolescents who participated in the study, and is not generalizable to the larger population of male

adolescents. In addition, because of snowball sampling method, the participants who volunteered to participate in this study may not be reflective of the diversity of male adolescents. That is, the participants may have been more willing to disclose personal information about themselves or were more confident in discussing body image issues than others. Exclusion of other male adolescents may have lead to potential exclusion of their perceptions of body image that may have been vital to my research questions.

Another assumption for this study is that the participants were truthful in their responses or responded in a way that best represented their thoughts and feelings on body image. The participants' responses to my interview questions may have been affected because they may want to provide responses that they felt I would want to hear. It is important to consider that an issue like body image may lead individuals to provide a socially desirable response to the researcher, which may not be representative of their true thoughts and feelings about body image. This issue is further exacerbated due to the fact that I am female and my participants were male adolescents. Fontana and Fey (2005) suggest that researcher-participant differences such as the researcher's gender may lead to problems during the interview, as the participants may not feel comfortable disclosing personal information to someone markedly different from themselves. According to Young and Tardiff (1992), trust and credibility needs to be established by the researcher. Doing so is crucial for "setting the stage for any subsequent interviews" (p. 138), as the participant would feel more committed to helping the researcher in terms of providing a more accurate portrayal of the research questions. Berg (2001) stated:

It is often assumed that if the interviewer measures up to the interviewee's role expectations, the interviewer is awarded the prize of good rapport with the

subject. If, on the other hand, the interviewer fails to measure up to these role expectations, the interviewer is turned away from the door. (p. 86)

Establishing trust is important because participants' perception of the interviewer's gender, race, demeanor, age, and style can give participants an idea of what the interviewer is like as a person (Berg, 2001) and ultimately, whether the interviewer can be trusted. This was an issue that I continuously thought about, particularly wanting to make the participants feel at ease throughout the interviews. There was some level of rapport, as I had met some participants (or their parents) at least once prior to interviews. Other participants who I had not met prior to the interviews were children of family friends and acquaintances. I tried to further increase rapport by asking them about school, their likes and dislikes, and their future aspirations. This was a part of the interview process, and was included in the interview schedule.

Despite these limitations, the present study provides further insight into male body image research and can pave the way for future research utilizing a larger sample of adolescent male youth.

Ethical Considerations

Since the current study is an investigation into the experiences of male adolescents, it is important to note the ethical considerations that arise. Talking about one's body is and can be a sensitive topic for some individuals, especially if there were much deeper issues of self-esteem. The following section describes issues of confidentiality in dealing with handling of data, and the risks and benefits involved in participating in the current study.

Confidentiality

An ethical issue that arises throughout many studies is the notion of confidentiality versus anonymity. Anonymity refers to the participants' data not being attached to any identifiers that may identify the participant just from the data alone (Creswell, 2008). Because this study was audio recorded, anonymity is not possible. Rather, I exercised confidentiality in the data that was collected. Creswell (2008) refers to confidentiality as a need-to-know basis: the data collected is privileged information and should only be shared between participant and researcher. The privacy of the participants was upheld by assigning pseudonyms for each individual before commencement of the interview. Other identifiers such as the location of the participants' residence, school attended or other individuals associated with participants were also removed, to further ensure confidentiality. Location of data collection was generalized to Southern Ontario. Contact information (e-mail) was collected from participants, for member checking purposes and for feedback of the final results of this study. Contact information and real names of participants were separated from data six weeks after completion of data collection, to give participants the opportunity to withdraw from the study, if they so chose. Personal information shared during the interview was not disclosed to third parties (parents and peers) and information collected was stored in my personal computer, only accessible by password. Only myself and my advisor have access to this data. All data collected during the study will be destroyed two years after the completion of the study.

With the issue of confidentiality comes the issue of safety for the participants. Although I was bound ethically to maintain confidentiality in the data I collected, if

participants disclosed information that may be harmful for them or another individual, I was compelled to take further action, by reporting any instances of abuse, bullying or illegal activities to Children's Aid, and was addressed to the participants prior to the interview. For all participants, I provided additional information for body image and general issues of self-esteem during debriefing. The information provided consisted of contact information for social support groups and further information on body image within the local community.

Risks and Benefits

A possible risk is that participants can potentially feel embarrassed for discussing any body concerns, gender identity or self-esteem issues, especially because I am a female researcher. Body image in itself is a sensitive topic for most people, especially if they already have (or had past) issues or feelings of unattractiveness. As a result, the participant may have felt uncomfortable divulging personal information. All potential participants were informed of the nature of the study and the sensitive issues that may be involved in the recruitment phase: the letters of consent and interview schedule were provided beforehand to ensure that individuals who do feel sensitive, vulnerable, or those who do not wish to participate were not coerced to participate.

In addition, participants in the current study were under the age of 18, thus requiring parental consent prior to participating. It was important that both participant and their parents were aware of the scope of the study, the topics or issues that may arise from interviews and the subsequent thoughts and feelings that follow. This was outlined in detail to both parents and the participants prior to and after the interview, allowing for an opportunity to raise any questions or concerns.

I do not believe that the current study posed a significantly high psychological risk since it is an issue that is ubiquitous within western society. Body image is an issue that most individuals encounter in their everyday lives. During the interview, participants were encouraged to speak up or stop the interview if they became substantially uncomfortable or distressed. Also, participants were informed that they were free to withdraw at any time during the research process (up until the date at which personal identifiers were separated from the data) and were free to not answer any questions that I asked if they did not feel comfortable responding. Lastly, following the interview, extensive debriefing was provided to each participant, outlining my purpose for researching the issue of male body image as well as a list further informing participants who may have questions, concerns, or want to investigate further about the issue of body image.

The study offers valuable educational benefits to the participants from their involvement with the project by promoting body image awareness and provided the participants the opportunity to discuss a sensitive issue like body image. The results from this study could potentially benefit them in that it could lead to further research into male body image. Currently there is little research on the topic of male body image that I am aware of, and I believe that this project can not only pave the way for further research (e.g., measures of body esteem designed for males), but also lead to educational and intervention programs specifically designed for males.

Summary of Methodology

The preceding chapter outlined the methodology of the present study. I adopted an interpretivist worldview because I believe that each individual's experience is unique.

With an issue such as body image, I felt that approaching this from a qualitative perspective (as opposed to a quantitative research method) would take into account each adolescent's unique experiences about their own body image. Six male adolescents aged 13 to 18 were recruited from various regions of Southern Ontario and were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format. Both parental consent and assent were obtained, as I sought participants who were under the age of majority (18 years). All interviews were transcribed and sent electronically to the participants for member checking. Once the transcribed interviews were coded, the codes were categorized into larger general themes for further analysis.

I discussed methodological assumptions and limitations to the present study. Firstly, I discussed the limitation of sample size of my study: gathering data from six participants was not representative of the general population of male adolescents. Thus, it was not possible to generalize the results based on the data of a few participants. Another limitation was the issue of truthfulness of the data collected. The participants may have felt obliged to provide me with socially acceptable responses and thus may not be accurate of their true thoughts and feeling on body image. It was important for me as a researcher to establish rapport with the participants, in order to gain their trust in disclosing personal information to me.

I also discussed my own status as a researcher and my own experiences as a former adolescent. Being a female researcher and having had prior knowledge of the issue of body image, I brought into the present study assumptions and biases that I had which could have potentially affected the way in which I conducted the study. I have

discussed my potential biases and the ways in which I will reflect on them throughout the research process.

I discussed ethical issues that arose during the course of the study. First, I discussed the issue of confidentiality. Because I interviewed my participants, there were potential identifiers within the data that could threaten the privacy of my participants. I have outlined ways in which I minimized these identifiers, to protect the privacy of my participants. I also outlined the limitations of confidentiality, specifically in instances where the participant could be experiencing harm.

Lastly, I outlined the risks and benefits for the participants involved in the present study. Because I am discussing a sensitive issue, my participants may have felt uncomfortable during and after the interview. I outlined a full debriefing including providing contact information for participants who wished to seek further information on their own.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter focuses on the findings of the present study and interpretation of these findings. Six male adolescents were interviewed and my self-reflections were recorded as fieldnotes. Transcribed interviews were sent electronically to participants for member checking. Electronic files were password protected, to ensure privacy of data. Some participants took the opportunity to change or add additional information to the interviews. Data analysis consisted of coding raw data using a priori and iterative codes.

In this chapter, a brief description of the participants is provided, based on the interviews and fieldnotes that were recorded. After analyzing the data, several themes became salient, as illustrated in Figure 1.

The second part of this chapter discusses the general themes that arose from these interviews. The first general theme, *body image as a status of health*, pertains to the perceptions the participants had about their bodies and body image in general as a part of overall physical health and being healthy. The second general theme, *body image as an expression of masculinity*, touches upon aspects of the concept of masculinity, including what is perceived as attractive and the influences of peers and popular culture may have on these male adolescents. The third general theme, *self-acceptance and self-improvement* pertains to the balance between elements of the physical self that can and cannot be changed. Lastly, the theme of *body image as an emotional positive experience* is a discussion of the thoughts and feelings the participants had on their overall experience in dealing with body image.

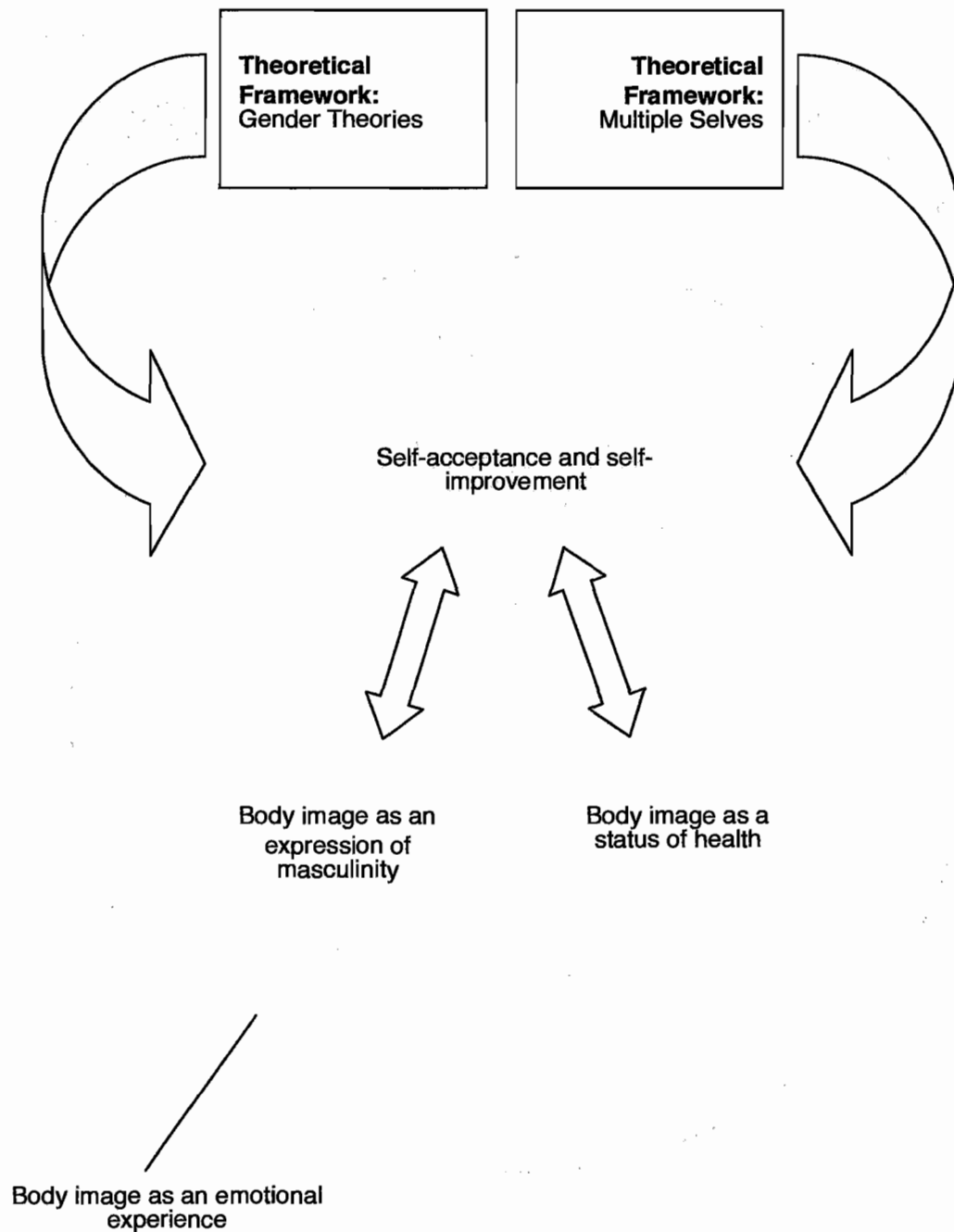


Figure 1. Relationship between themes of body image as an expression of masculinity, body image as a status of health, self-acceptance and self-improvement, and body image as an emotional experience.

The Participants

The following section is a brief overview of each participant. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to ensure confidentiality. Table 2 summarizes the participants' age, ethnicity, and date of interview.

Bob is a 17 year-old male Caucasian. I met with him one weekday afternoon during his break from his part-time job. The interview was pre-arranged by Bob. We sat down in a private seated area where we first began discussing the scope of the study. The parental consent form was already signed but Bob signed his participant assent at the time of the interview. His hands were clasped and placed on the table during our interview. At times, he would use his hands as if to further elaborate on his expressions. I found myself not asking many follow up questions. During the interview, he kept eye contact with me, which gave me the impression that he seemed confident and comfortable talking about this issue.

Clint is a 13-year-old Caucasian male adolescent in Grade 8. I met with him on a weekday evening at his house that was pre-arranged by his mother. After briefly discussing the study with both Clint and his mother, his mother signed the consent form at the same time Clint signed his participant assent form. She then left the house to give us some privacy during the interview. Clint's father was in another room and did not come out for the duration that I was there. I interviewed Clint in their dining room, sitting at the table. At first glance, he had an outgoing personality and even joked around with me. He smiled and laughed throughout the interview, but maintained a serious tone when answering certain questions. His responses were short and oftentimes, I found myself probing further by asking follow up questions. By the end of the interview, he

Table 2

A summary of the participants

Participant	Age	Ethnicity	Date of interview
Bob	17	Caucasian	9 March 2011
Clint	13	Caucasian	10 March 2011
Tae Yang	14	Asian	13 March 2011
Ethan	16	Asian	17 March 2011
Adrian	15	Asian	17 March 2011
Chris	18	Asian	19 March 2011

mentioned that he has had “10 girlfriends over the past school year” and is always around female peers. He enjoys being in gym class and hopes to one day become a police officer.

Tae Yang is 14 years old and of Asian descent. Our interview was scheduled on an afternoon during the weekend at his home, as pre-arranged by his mother. The family had just arrived from a day of shopping. The mother took time to read over the parental consent form prior to signing it. At this time, Tae Yang also signed the consent form as we briefly discussed the purpose of the study. The interview took place in their living room. During our interview, made eye contact and repeated several times throughout the interview that he was a fairly confident person.

Ethan is a 16-year-old adolescent male of Asian descent in Grade 11. I met with Ethan on a weekday morning during spring break at his home. This was decided upon by his father prior to our meeting. His father and grandparents were home but did not approach us during the interview. Ethan led me to their basement, where we were seated at a table. He told me he is fairly confident about his abilities and his overall self. During the interview, he made eye contact, which gave me the impression that he was comfortable talking about issues of body image. His hands were clasped and placed on the table in what appeared to be a casual manner.

Adrian is a 15-year-old male adolescent of Asian descent in Grade 10 with hopes of pursuing culinary studies in college to become a chef. I met with Adrian in his home on an afternoon during his spring break. His father was home at the time of the interview, but left to go for a walk after signing the parental consent. We were seated in their dining room during the interview, where he sat in what appeared to be a casual

manner during our interview. He was constantly touching his arms, especially in the beginning of the interview when he was discussing his skin condition, describing that his skin is often red, sometimes scratching the arms to signify the moments when his skin does get itchy. Eventually, he stated that he was fairly comfortable talking about his body. Towards the end of the interview, his mother came home. She was aware that the interview was taking place and only asked a few questions regarding the study at the end of the interview.

Lastly, Chris is an 18-year-old male adolescent in Grade 12. At the time of the interview, he was waiting for a response from universities, as he planned on attending one next year to study engineering. I met with Chris at his home on a weekend afternoon, pre-arranged by his father. We briefly discussed the interview, at which time both his father and Chris signed the parental consent and participant assent forms. Both his parents left for a short time, so as not to disturb the interview, however, his older brother and family were in another room in the house. He sat comfortably on their dining room table, slouched, appearing relaxed. During our interview, he referred back to the interview schedule that I provided prior to the interview.

Body Image as a Status of Health

The first theme that emerged from the data was the participants' perception of body image as a status of health. This general theme was defined as any issues pertaining to physical ability, strength, or health status, including healthy eating, healthy lifestyle, and the consequences that come with adopting a healthy lifestyle. The theoretical framework of multiple selves suggests that individuals present a self that they feel others would find acceptable, as individuals enact a specific persona dependent upon the

situation they are in (Goffman, 1959; Harter et al., 1997/2002). The theme of body image as a status of health reflects the participants' desire to convey a self that is physically capable and skillful, healthy, and not lazy. For example, Bob, 17 years old, stated:

I know I'm not the most fit person and I still work towards a better, not necessarily physical appearance, but be healthier at least...Because when I do certain things like running or certain sports, I find I get tired a lot easily, but it's never really been about appearance for me. It's more just being able to do these things.

Clint, 13 years old, expressed a similar concern for physical endurance: "just not running down the street and going (heavy breathing simulating out of breath)." Similarly, Adrian, 15 years old, mentioned that body image for him is "What...we are capable of and what you're not capable of." What was indicated here is that it is ideal to be in optimal physical condition and undesirable to be unable to accomplish physical tasks. These findings were consistent with Krayner et al. (2008), who suggested that "boys place more importance on functionality [of the body] than appearance" (p. 897). Perhaps concerns with muscularity and strength rather than aesthetic physical appearance is the result of conveying an image of masculinity (Jones & Crawford, 2005).

In the conversation with Adrian, he mentions his skin condition as something he is concerned about in terms of his physical appearance:

My physical appearance I say? I like it but the only thing I don't like is about my skin...not a lot of people have my type of skin. And it's kind of weird when you look at it...It's kind of bumpy and dry and I've asked the doctor about it he said

it's a normal thing, I was born with it so yeah...Because sometimes it's when I, it sometimes feels itchy and sometimes irritates my skin.

What these participants indicated in terms of physical attractiveness are the aesthetics of their bodies that to them, may not be perceived as ideal to the people around them.

Health status, as determined by physical capability pertained to any mention of body image in terms of healthy eating, healthy lifestyle, and the repercussions that come with adopting a healthy lifestyle (Abbott & Barber, 2010; Morgan & Arcelus, 2009).

Interestingly, Bob, 17 years old, also indicated that overweight status was a reflection of being physically inactive, as body image to him is “that perception of how they [other people] think of you. Like if they think you're overweight or something like that then they might think you're not good at sports or things like that.” This certainly reflects the results of previous studies in which children and adolescents believed that being overweight is related to laziness (Grogan & Richards, 2002). Implications to this stereotype could potentially lead to stigmatization of overweight individuals (Himes & Thompson, 2007; Hussin et al., 2011; Puhl & Brownell, 2001).

The theme of body image as a status of health was also evident in participants who indicated speaking to their families, as their families provided support and encouragement. For example, Bob, 17 years old, recalled talking to his family about his physical appearance in terms of health, and encouraged him to work towards improving his health:

I used to be a lot bigger, and they would always tell me the same thing: ‘It's not about your physical appearance, it's just we want you to be healthy and don't want you to die of a disease or like heart related disease' or anything like that.

Throughout his interview, it was evident that family was important to Bob, as in most of his experiences, his family was always involved. It was unsurprising that Bob would mention that his family was his greatest influence: “I would say probably my family just because like I said, they were the ones telling me it’s not about physical appearance it’s about being healthy and be able to do things.” Consistent with previous studies (Ricciardelli et al., 2000), the influence of family members were important for the participants, particularly when it comes to providing support for adolescent youth.

Body Image as an Expression of Masculinity

Another theme that arose from the interviews was the concept of body image as an expression of masculinity, as it is reflected through. Imperative to this theme is the theoretical framework of gender theories, which proposes a culturally constructed (and therefore natural) view of sex and gender (Butler, 1999). Throughout the interviews, it was evident that all participants wanted to portray a self that is masculine, particularly in how masculinity is expressed through their bodies, elements of physical appearance that reflects masculinity, and reasons why they wanted to appear masculine.

Important to the notion of expressing masculinity was appearing muscular, as Clint, 13 years old, mentioned: “I think I’m pretty in shape...Because I have muscle...(flexes bicep to show off muscle).” When I further probed and asked him what else he thought of that pertains to physical appearance, he immediately responded with “Sixpacks.” Similarly, Ethan, 16 years old, described his experience on the downside of not having muscle (defined by Ethan as being too skinny): “My friends joke around that I’m a skinny guy but I know it’s genetics so I can handle it.” Ethan acknowledged that being skinny is not optimal, as his peers teased him. Thus, he implied that he might not

believe being skinny as a male adolescent is not physically attractive. In addition, the notion of being able to handle his friends teasing is also indicative of the masculine mentality of not caring about physical appearance.

In relation to appearing muscular, participants also indicated reasons why they wanted to appear muscular. Tae Yang, 14 years old, stated, “For me, I always want to impress girls mostly. So like just trying to get abs and muscles and all that stuff, that’s like my main concern, like my goal.” Clint, 13 years old, reiterated his reasons for having muscles as a way to “get the girls.” Both Tae Yang and Clint mentioned that looking fit is something they strived for, mainly for the attention of girls. It seemed that what was deemed as physically attractive depended on what was accepted as attractive by female peers.

The theme of body image as an expression of masculinity was also evident for participants who described experiences of talking about their physical appearance with peers. Adrian, 15 years old, described the first time he talked about his body to his male friends:

First time talking about my physical appearance was kind of weird...They [his friends] felt weird at first but after more talk they got it, felt better...Like “why are you talking about this stuff?”...Because they’ve never experienced talking about this before.

The undertones of masculinity were evident in Adrian’s friends’ responses, particularly the response “Why are you talking about this stuff?” Under the rules of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005; Kehler, 2009), boys and men who do not conform to the status quo of masculinity are subject to ridicule. Adrian was not ridiculed for choosing to

speak to his friends about his physical appearance, though feeling weird about the situation indicated that it was not something that Adrian or his friends talked about on a regular basis.

Masculinity in Popular Culture

Within the theme of body image as an expression of masculinity, the sub-theme of masculinity in popular culture was evident in some of the participants' responses. As stated earlier, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. Prior to the interview, participants were given the opportunity to come up with their own pseudonym. What interested me was Clint and Tae Yang's choice of pseudonym. Clint, 13 years old, decided on his pseudonym, named after the actor, Clint Eastwood while Tae Yang, 14 years old, chose his pseudonym after a Korean Hip Hop artist TaeYang that he admired. Interestingly, Tae Yang admitted to choosing his pseudonym because TaeYang (the Korean Hip Hop artist) was someone he wanted to be like and was his greatest influence:

I'm very into Korean music and all that. So there is this artist, his name is

TaeYang, and then whenever we bring him up, it's all the girls would be like 'oh he's so hot.' And so that's why I'm trying to get my body to look like his.

Similarly, Clint mentioned looking up to rap artist, Eminem. When I asked why, he says "Because he's awesome...Awesome...Swears a lot. (Laughing)...because he can rap."

Masculine role models in popular culture were evident, not only in some of the participants' choice of pseudonyms, but also how their masculinity was influential in the ways participants viewed their own bodies and what ideal they wanted to achieve.

In contrast to the study by Ricciardelli et al. (2000), it was evident in Tae Yang, Clint, and Adrian's responses that they all indicated that famous male celebrities and

athletes acted as their role models. For example, both Tae Yang and Clint mention having hip-hop artists as role models in influencing them. The origins of hip-hop is, as Neal (2005) points out, “a primary site for the articulation of distinct forms of black masculinity: urban, hyper-masculine, hyper-sexual, pseudo-criminalized” (p. 129). Though hip-hop has branched out, not limiting itself to black culture, it remains to hold onto a western view of masculinity. In general, perhaps these celebrity role models serve as a status quo with regards to what these participants strive for in terms of masculinity (Saucier, 2011), including that of physical appearance.

Adrian, 15 years old, expressed similar goals with regards to his physical appearance, with athletes and individuals on television serving as his role models: “I think some people [who] influenced me were like basketball players, people on TV like I look back before, but now I’m skinny, but mostly basketball players because I want to have the same body as them.” Similar to the underlying masculine messages portrayed in hip hop culture, Messner (1990/2009) stated that sports “ensures the kind of attention and connection that [boys and men] crave; it is being *better* than the other guys—*beating* them—that is the key to acceptance” (p. 128). To be and want to be sporty, as evident in Adrian’s desire to “want to have the same body as [basketball players]” seems to be naturally masculine, which according to Connell (2005) tends to “aggression, family, life, competitiveness, political power, hierarchy, territoriality, promiscuity and forming men’s clubs” (p. 46).

Self-acceptance and Self-improvement

The general theme of self-acceptance and self-improvement was also prominent from the data and pertained to any issues that dealt with comparing oneself with being

healthy and masculine (the other two general themes). Within this general theme, I am reminded once again of the theoretical framework of multiple selves, in which Harter et al. (1997/2002) wrote adolescent individuals take on different selves and eventually integrate them to form an adult self. For these participants, finding a balance between aspects of their physical appearance that they accept and aspects that they like to change is reflective of their desire to establish a self that is uniquely them. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between the theme of self-acceptance and self-improvement with the sub-themes of *social comparisons* with others and *establishing individuality* and the other two themes of body image as a status of health and body image as an expression of masculinity.

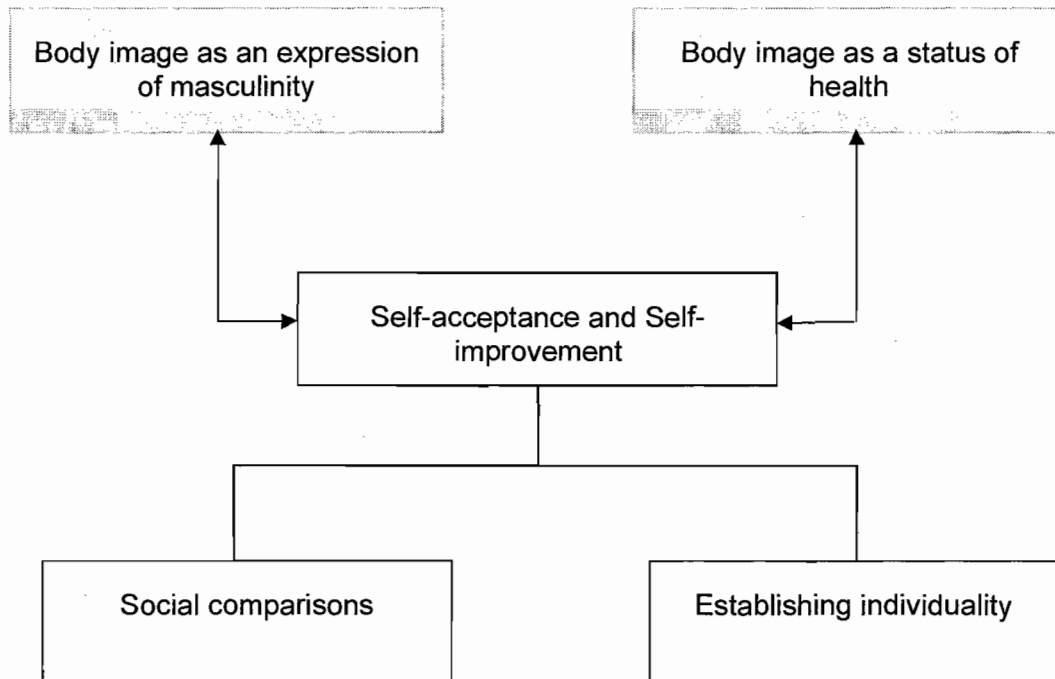


Figure 2. Participants' perceptions of the concept of body image: The theme of self-acceptance and self-improvement.

Social comparisons

Crucial to the concept of self-acceptance and self-improvement is the balance between aspects of one's physical appearance that can and cannot be changed. As indicated by Bob, 17 years old: "I still work towards a better, not necessarily physical appearance, but be healthier at least." Here Bob discussed his goal of working towards a better self. This suggests that he is not yet satisfied or accepting of his current physical state. However, he does not seem to be overly concerned about his physical appearance nor is striving for his ideal physical attractiveness a priority in his life at that moment. In another example, Ethan, 16 years old, mentioned his status as "the skinny guy" compared to his friends. Being as skinny as he was may be not be what his ideal body type is (he never mentioned it, but he implied that he knows he is too skinny), he knew that it was genetics or something that he is predisposed to and has thus, accepted his skinny body. Examples by Bob and Ethan illustrate that there is some ideal out there with which they compare themselves.

I asked Adrian, 15 years old, why he decided to talk to his friends about his body. His reason for talking to his friends was to compare himself to them: "When I was younger, I was different from the other kids. I was more chubby, shorter, slow, and yeah, I asked questions like "why are you...so much taller and skinner than me?" Adrian further stated,

When you're talking about your body like that, you're also thinking about how can I, how can I be that? How can I be more willing to take weight off in the future? How can I be better in my lifestyle?

Speaking to peers, as a means of comparing oneself to another, was also evident in Chris's response (18 years old):

I just compare myself with them. Usually when I go out to places I get their opinions. I have a buddy who I go out with, and we go to the gym together and we work out and talk about stuff like that too.

Chris also mentioned talking to girls, as he found girls had "the best advice." Ethan, 16 years old, mentioned that he often looked up to his older brother as an influential figure in how he perceived his body image:

I guess because I like his style and taste in clothing, I look for similar things. I remember growing up I would pick out what to wear and ask him for his opinion. If he said it was cool, I'd be really happy.

This is consistent with past research (Krayner et al., 2008), whereby adolescents were heavily influenced by what is accepted by peers in terms of physical appearance. The notion of which gender has more influence on physical appearance was not investigated in this study, however, what was clear was that peer influence was a way to compare themselves to same sex peers (Ethan with his older brother and Chris with his friends) while seeking romantic relationships from female peers (Clint and Tae Yang who wanted muscles to "get the girls").

Establishing Individuality

What was also imperative to the participants in terms of their body image was the importance of establishing an individual image or an attempt to be unique from others. Ethan defined body image as, "One's physical appearance, so how one looks and dresses." Similarly, Bob, 17 years old, mentioned body image as having an individual

“put themselves out there,” further implying how an individual carries themselves or uses what they have to create an image.

Within the concept of establishing individuality was how participants “put themselves out there” (Bob). For example, Chris, 18 years old, noted that body image was:

One’s own personal style, their own swag, I guess...Swag is, I don’t know, some street or fashion, how they express themselves so...yeah. It’s a slang word, and I think body image is one person’s own style...however they want to look like.

The term *swag* was used in terms of clothing and style, reminiscent of finding one’s own comfort level with their bodies, as expressed through clothing or attitude towards oneself.

I asked Chris what influenced his swag:

I don’t really have an influence really. There are some styles that attract my attention, and that are pretty interesting to me, I like to copy. But otherwise, I don’t really have like a role model or anything... I just wear like shirts that are comfortable, like nothing baggy at all or anything, some skinny jeans and stuff and dress shirts too... I like to be myself, I don’t like to let anybody influence me.

I don’t like copying people’s styles. I like to have my own style, something that expresses myself, this is me.

Gill, Henwood, and McLean (2005) found that the men in their study similarly believed that while outside influences only slightly affected their perceptions of physical attractiveness, the decision to look a certain way or portray a certain self was completely their own decision. Sociological studies (Galilee, 2002; Newholm & Hopkinson, 2009) address the phenomenon of the consumer paradox, where consumers of clothing seek

clothing as a means to express their individual selves. However, the possibility of that is not completely individualistic, as fashion clothing is produced by the mass, for the masses. Blaikie (2009) explored visual identity through clothing among men and women and found that “clothing, shoes, ties and accessories speak to and reveal the values of the wearer relating to political and social views, sexual orientation, gender, culture, and religion” (p. 30). Blaikie’s findings are applicable to the findings of this study, as evident in most of the participants’ responses to body image: they strive to stand out from the ordinary (Chris), to be noticed by girls (Tae Yang, Clint), and accepted by peers (Ethan, Adrian), but they stay within the social constructions of physical attractiveness to remain accepted within the majority of boys and men.

Body Image as an Emotional Experience

Interestingly, the experiences participants shared with me were all positive ones, with participants reporting feelings of support and encouragement from the people they spoke to. This was evident in the way Bob, 17 years old, and Ethan, 16 years old, spoke of their experiences with their families, both of whom emphasized the importance of their families in shaping their views of themselves. In particular, Bob felt that his family encouraged him to live a healthier lifestyle. Consistent with previous studies (Ricciardelli et al., 2000), the influence of family members are important, particularly when it comes to providing support for adolescent youth. Consistent with Gillen and Lefkowitz (2009), the participants in this study report parental encouragement as a positive experience, as neither Bob nor Ethan report feelings of dissatisfaction with their bodies, as they described their experiences as encouraging and supportive. Perhaps

parental acceptance acted as a buffer towards self-acceptance of their physical appearance (Crespo et al., 2010) for Bob and Ethan.

Positive Experiences in the Classroom

Other positive experiences that the participants shared were in the classroom, where it was indicated that teachers were supportive, in terms of being open to discussing topics related to body issues with students. Bob explains that his teacher “was very open about it. He said if you have any questions, come up and ask me. You can ask me in private too if you don’t feel comfortable about it.” Ethan expressed a similar experience with his teacher: “I felt that my teacher was very open to what we had to say and he encouraged us to talk during class discussions.” Chris, 18 years old, further adds, “they’re really cool about it really open because they know that it’s a pretty hard course to teach right?” According to Ethan, “[the teacher’s approach] wasn’t too bad. There were plenty of funny moments in the class discussions so we all had fun. Even my teacher was cracking some jokes.” Tae Yang, 14 years old, described, “I did think my teachers are very inviting. Like they can relate to us very well. So it’s not like they’re conservative and strict and all that.” In general, the participants indicated that their teachers used different strategies in creating a positive environment in which to discuss “a pretty hard course to teach” (Chris).

Despite having positive experiences in talking about body image in the classroom, participants indicated that they were not or would not be comfortable approaching a teacher, principal, or guidance counselor if they had any concerns about their physical appearance. Reasons for not wanting to share their concerns with teachers may be due to the sensitive issues surrounding body image, as Clint, 13 years old, mentioned, body

image is “just personal stuff. Like you talk about your body...you think, yikes, you have to see [teachers] every day and they give you weird looks.” Within Clint’s response, it was evident that having to portray a masculine persona was important. As stated earlier, masculinity entails having boys abide by an unwritten set of rules in which to guide their behavior and failure to do so could result in the individual being ridiculed (Kehler, 2009). Clint chose not to speak to his teachers with the assumption that his teachers would give him “weird looks.”

Other reasons participants do not or would not be comfortable talking to educators about their bodies was because they did not feel that they can connect on a personal level with their teachers. Chris, 18 years old, stated, “[Teachers] don’t really care how I look really. And I don’t see why I should be free to talk about or discuss this to them about it.” Adrian, 15 years old, mentioned:

That’s kind of weird [talking to teachers] because they’re not really in your life a lot. It’s more comfortable to talk about it to your parents about your physical appearance...I mean, if you’re really really really like best friends with the teacher you can do that. I mean I would feel comfortable, but if I’m not, I really don’t know the teacher. I don’t feel it because your parents were there since you were born and seeing you develop and they give you like ideas on what ways you can get better and how you can be good-looking.

Ethan, 16 years old, expressed a similar concern: “I don’t really like my guidance counselor. I don’t know my principal because he’s new. I guess I just don’t really feel any need to.” When I asked Ethan why he felt that way, he responded, “I know I can speak to my parents about anything.” Bob, 17 years old, further stated, “I think it’s

helpful. I know certain people don't feel comfortable confiding in people but then it's a private setting like that, like with the counselor in school or anything like that, one-on-one." What is evident here is there are limits to certain topics or subjects that can be discussed with educators. This was evident when Adrian and Ethan compared their relationship with their teachers to that of their parents. Keeping a professional distance from teachers is indicative of participants' reluctance to disclose personal information in general. Again, this could mean that perhaps teachers could promote a more inviting, non-judgmental, gender inclusive atmosphere to encourage students to speak up, if they choose to, as Bob states.

"It doesn't really bother me"

All of the participants at one point during our interviews expressed their level of comfort and confidence in themselves, including expressing views on their physical appearance and body image in general. I was interested in exploring the feminine and gay stereotypes associated with body image, as previously found in research (Elliott & Elliott, 2005; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006; Krayner et al., 2008). Upon discussing this issue with Tae Yang, 14 years old, he immediately brought up the concept of stereotypes:

I think that it's because whenever our teachers have talked about body image, often they talk about the issues surrounding girls such as how they always wanna be skinny because they think they're fat due to what they see in the media.

Tae Yang mentioned the phenomenon of wanting to be skinny as a feminine issue that is salient in the media. He also mentioned popular culture, in the form of media, as a way that sets a standard for girls and women. On the other hand, Clint, 13 years old,

mentioned the focus on and showing concern for parts of their bodies' aesthetically among girls:

Well I think people would think it's a feminine or gay issue because like girls focus on like 'oh my hair, my hair' and they're like 'oh my nails are broken now.' And they think it was the gay issue like because it's like boys, it's like 'oy!' (flips right hand in downward motion) They're thinking they're different, but really they're not.

Both Tae Yang and Clint point out gender stereotypes, most notably, stating thoughts and behaviors that they felt were more feminine.

Upon asking participants what their thoughts and feelings were towards the statement "body image is a girl or a gay issue," five of the participants disagreed with the statement, as Bob, 17 years old, states, "I don't agree with the statements. No, I think everyone should think about how they look, not necessarily how they look physically, but how they, I guess put themselves out there." Similarly, Chris, 18 years old, stated: "I don't really think it's [a female or gay] issue because there's nothing feminine about it, anyone can talk about their body image." In contrast to past studies (Elliott & Elliott, 2005; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006; Kraye et al., 2008), the participants in this study disagreed with the notion that body image is an issue exclusive of girls, women and gay men. In particular, the participants stressed that some male adolescents do think about their physical appearance and realize that physical appearance, including health, looking and being fit, and clothing choice is an integral part of their lives. Thus, participants agreed that body image is certainly applicable to all individuals, regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, or otherwise.

Alternatively, it is possible that participants—knowing the scope of the research and myself being a female researcher—responded in a way they believed was socially acceptable, possibly downplaying how body image issues affect them. This socially acceptable response was perhaps most evident when the participants indicated that body image was not something they were concerned about and in the experiences participants shared. Adrian, 15 years old, stated, “After I talked to [friends] I felt much better about myself and it didn’t push me afterwards to be like them, like to get skinnier, be a little more buff, be like them a little bit.” Chris, 18 years old, expressed a similar experience in talking to his male friends:

I talked to them about it, I got their opinions and stuff. But I still stuck with what I felt too, like what I thought felt comfortable. I wasn’t really dependent on them. I just wanted to dress myself the way I wanted to and make myself look how I want.

I further asked Chris what he thought about in terms of his physical appearance:

I think my physical appearance is good. I don’t see any problems with it. I’m not that concerned. I feel comfortable about it...Because it doesn’t really bother me. Like, I am who I am right? So I just do whatever I want.

Bob, 17 years old, expressed similar thoughts throughout his interview and made it clear that for him, body image is not about physical attractiveness. The participants’ feelings of body image as not their concern is best summed up by Clint, 13 years old, who said, “School can be applied to real world and some things [but] how’s your physical appearance going to help you in life?”

The participants' views of body image as something that "doesn't really bother" them was also salient in the length of their interviews. As stated in Chapter Three, the duration of interviews were between 10 and 15 minutes. In addition, there was a degree of difficulty in trying to get the participants to elaborate on their responses, especially regarding the sensitive and private nature of body image. This is unsurprising, as previous literature (Galilee, 2002) has noted that there are certain practices associated with other groups of men (namely gender, sexual orientation and class) that the participant may not have wanted to be associated with. Responses are consistent with other findings regarding adolescents' reluctance to disclose their true thoughts and feelings. As Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2006) suggested, there is still a degree of reluctance among some male adolescents in discussing issues of body image. The length of the interviews combined with the participants' choice of sharing only positive experiences indicated that while it is easy to give one's opinions on body image within society in general, it is not so easy to share individual experiences, thoughts, and feelings. The desire to please the researcher by providing socially acceptable responses may have masked their true thoughts and feelings about body image. This issue of pleasing the researcher and the implications for the results of this study are further discussed in the following chapter.

Summary of Findings

This chapter focused on the results and interpretation of the findings from the present study. Six male adolescents were interviewed one-on-one, at a time and location that was convenient for them. After transcription and member checking, interview transcripts were subject to qualitative data analysis that was outlined in Chapter Three.

This chapter provided a brief background about each participant based on the fieldnotes taken immediately following the interviews. I explained in detail the general themes that emerged from all the interviews (perceptions of body image as a status of health, body image as an expression of masculinity, self-acceptance and self-improvement, and body image as an emotional experience) and subsequently discussed how the themes interacted with one another. To further illustrate the interactions between themes, flow charts and diagrams were used. The proceeding chapter will discuss the findings from this chapter, including implications for theory, future research, and educational practice.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This final chapter is a discussion of the results explained in the previous chapter. I will be combining the findings of the previous chapter with the literature outlined in Chapter Two and the theoretical background of my first chapter to answer my research questions. This study aimed to explore the perceptions of body image in six male adolescents. My research questions were:

1. What are these male adolescents' perceptions of their own body image? How did they learn this?
2. Do these male adolescents believe that body image is a "feminine" or "gay" issue? Why or why not?
3. What are these male adolescents' experiences in discussing their body image issues?
4. When do these male adolescents' feel it is appropriate to discuss their body concerns?

This chapter is divided into three major sections. To address the above research questions, the first section is a discussion of the key findings of the study. The second section discusses implications for educational practice and highlights how the findings of the current study could promote a positive attitude in adolescents of all gender orientations toward proactive discussion and inquiry regarding body image. The final section of this chapter discusses implications for further research and offers questions to be explored in future. This section incorporates the general findings of the present study for further research and inquiry. I included the biases and assumptions that I encountered

during my research journey. The chapter concludes with a critical reflection of the research study and the general topic of body image.

Discussion

This exploratory study sought to gain a better understanding of male body image among male adolescents. This section answers the research questions that were first established in Chapter One, referring back to the theoretical frameworks of adolescent identity development (Harter, 1990; Harter et al., 1997/2002; Harter et al., 1997), gender identity (Butler, 1994; 2004), and hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005).

My first research question sought to determine the perceptions of male adolescents' body image. It was clear that there were multiple viewpoints of which the participants viewed their physical appearance. Through the convoluted interactions between the themes, body image was perceived as a combination of how participants viewed and portrayed themselves in terms of health and masculinity. Within these two constructs was an overlap in what participants determined to be healthy and what is masculine. This was evident in their desire to have muscle (Clint, Tae Yang, Adrian). For example, the appearance of muscle indicative of a physical capability and function (health) while simultaneously indicative of degree of manliness and attention from female peers (masculinity).

In addition, the participants sought to find a balance between accepting aspects of their physical appearance while simultaneously wanting to improve themselves. This theme implied that these participants think about their physical appearance. Although they did not report feeling substantially distressed over their physical imperfections, a finding consistent in the literature (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006; Labre, 2002;

Manturuk, 2009; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004), they nonetheless expressed a degree of concern if they did not fall within a normal ideal, a finding consistent with Strovoll et al. (2005). According to McCabe and Ricciardelli (2004), there may be a wider range of acceptable beauty ideals among boys and men, for example, some prefer to be more muscular while others prefer a lean look. The present findings further build on McCabe and Ricciardelli's (2004) study by suggesting that there is a wider range of what body image meant for the participants in this study.

As with the notion that adolescents have multiple selves that they can explore in different situations (Harter, 1990, 2008; Harter et al., 1997/2002), adolescents are largely free to choose what aspect of their identity to convey to others through clothing choice and in demeanor, as they try to impress their family and peers. Sources of influence come from parents, peers, and popular culture. The balance between self-acceptance and self-improvement was also evident in how the participants learned their perceptions of their own body image, by comparing their own appearance with what was perceived as attractive to these influences. Notions of masculinity resonated in how these socio-cultural influences affected their current views of their bodies, including physical strength and dominance over others (Connell, 2005).

In answering my second research question, "do these male adolescents believe that body image is a feminine or a gay issue?" it seemed clear that for the participants, body image is not exclusive for girls, women, and gay men. What was evident in their responses was the growing change in views of how body image should not be attached to any behaviors, thoughts, and feelings of a gender identity or of sexual orientation, findings that contrast previous studies (Elliott & Elliott, 2005; Hargreaves & Tiggemann,

2006; Krayner et al., 2008). Conversely, participants could have wanted to provide responses that they believed were socially acceptable, especially given my own previous experience and knowledge on the topic and the expectations I had when I began this project. I am reminded of the study conducted by Chadwick and Foster (2007), who concluded that:

Despite the fact that participants valiantly tried to redefine masculinity in alternative ways, these re-articulations invariably worked to reproduce the idea of natural, innate differences between the sexes, to bolster the notion of an essential, unmutable male core and to silence issues relating to gender oppression. (p. 36)

This second research question remains unanswered. While participants disagreed on the notion that “body image is a feminine or a gay issue,” reasons why there is disagreement needs to be further explored. The challenge with any type of research conducted is the fact that participants can pick and choose what to disclose, thereby not completely representing their thoughts and feelings about a given issue. I can relate with the participants, as having participated in past studies as an undergraduate student, it was difficult at the time to decide what aspects of myself I wanted to disclose and what I wanted to keep secret. Despite this, the data collected in this study could potentially lead future studies in a direction where feminine and queer issues in body image can be further addressed.

My third research question explored the participants’ experiences in discussing their body image issues. Where and how these viewpoints of body image come from are influenced by a plethora of sources, including family, peers, and popular culture. All these individuals provided an open ear and support. Overall, the experiences that the

participants discussed were positive ones, giving way to satisfaction with their own physical appearance. On the one hand, it could be taken at face value; perhaps the participants only had positive experiences in dealing with physical appearance. Based upon the concept of male privilege (McIntosh, 1988), in which males unknowingly believe their own lives are neutral and normal, therefore, ideal, Kwan (2010) suggested that “men can generally take for granted that they will be treated with respect and dignity as they go about their daily routines” (p. 155), regardless of their physical appearance. The participants’ status as males may allow them to only recognize their experiences as positive ones, as masculinity is not solely based on physical attractiveness.

However, I am reminded of Adrian’s experiences in talking to his friends, namely the “weird” feeling that Adrian experienced, and Ethan’s friends, who teased him for “being a skinny guy.” Both their experiences, though positive in the end, led me to believe that there may be other emotions in addition to positive ones such as “I felt much better about myself” (Adrian) and “What I thought felt comfortable” (Chris). For example, Adrian’s friends’ responses of feeling weird may be a reflection of the behaviors, thoughts, and feelings associated with masculinity, as talking about body image concerns were not what they believed to be typically masculine. Feeling weird cannot be determined as either positive or negative, though from Adrian’s response, it seemed that feeling weird meant to feel off or not typical. Future studies could address the feeling of weird, particularly how it plays as a possible emotion that is experienced by individuals.

For Ethan, despite having his friends joke around about Ethan being a skinny guy, Ethan brushed it off. This was evident in his comment, “I can handle it.” According to

Keltner, Capps, Kring, Young, and Heerey (2001), teasing is a “playful provocation in which one person comments on something relevant to the target” (p. 229). Taylor (2011) conducted an ethnographic study on weight-based teasing among male and female adolescents. She found that regardless of sex and gender, teasing was used as means to:

[Engage] in “othering” discourses of their peers’ body fat, the teens...regardless of their size, were able to discursively construct themselves as “normal” in comparison. In doing so, they negotiated a higher social rank for themselves and distanced themselves from the reality of everyday fatness. (Taylor, 2011, p. 194)

However, she found that while male adolescents tended to downplay their emotional experiences when faced with weight-based teasing, whether they ultimately feel emotional pain to direct teasing or not was more dependent upon whom it was doing the teasing. The downplaying of teasing was an interesting concept for Taylor (2011), who asked, “Are boys just joking around when they tease their friends about their body size...Or were boys who got teased by their friends putting up a brave front and pretending not to care?” (p. 190). This “pretending not to care” (Taylor, 2011, p. 190) mentality was perhaps a mechanism for Ethan. In other words, not letting the ridicule become personal for Ethan is his façade for reinforcing his masculinity.

According to Butler (1999), both gender and sex are culturally constructed, as individuals assigned a given sex are automatically presumed to adhere to the socially acceptable norms of the corresponding gender. Kehler (2009) argues that the definition of masculinity is “constructed through interactions” (p. 157) such that boys’ social interactions and constructions of themselves affect the notion of masculinity, which in turn, affect the way boys socially interact. Under the rules of hegemonic masculinity

(Connell, 2005; Kehler, 2009), boys and men who do not conform to the status quo of masculinity are subject to ridicule. As such, these individuals constantly behave in a way that they feel reinforces their culture's definition of masculinity (Kehler, 2009), because it is natural and normal (Connell, 2005; Zipes, 2006). What would be interesting as a follow up or for future studies is to further investigate why the participants decided to share positive experiences with me rather than negative ones.

My final research question dealt with when the participants felt it was appropriate to discuss their body concerns. In talking to teachers about their physical appearance, some participants found it to be a little too personal, preferring to speak to parents and even peers about their physical appearance. However, overall, it seems that all participants were confident and comfortable in disclosing issues of their physical appearance, especially to others with whom they are close.

The masculine undertones portrayed by the participants in the study were evident: while they stated a level of comfort and confidence when talking about their bodies, the participants only reported feelings of confidence, comfort, and feelings of "it doesn't really bother me," (Chris) in their experiences. However, while they believe it is acceptable to talk to teachers, they still would not do so themselves, indicating that there is a degree of personal space that must be given. Despite this, the participants felt that it was more socially acceptable for boys and men to talk about issues that were once taboo for them, but it is also socially acceptable to not talk about body image. As stated by Ethan, "people can talk about it for sure, but not everyone has or needs to." I am reminded of Petrie (1982/2009) who stated that there is a belief in western society in which men are rational and unemotional. He wrote "In doing this, one reveals a persona

rather than a person, plays a part rather than being part of the relationship” (Petrie, 1982/2009, p. 232).

Implications for Educational Practice

According to Giroux (1994), incorporating popular culture into critical pedagogy is important, as it provides individuals a means to critically analyze the images and ideology that they are bombarded with on a daily basis. Critical pedagogy is not limited to learning within the classroom, as was evident in the different experiences the participants had in dealing with their bodies (among family, friends, and teachers).

Bosacki (2008) suggested that children be “encouraged to read various forms of media and to critically explore the text and reflect and engage in conversations about what are the emotional and moral implications of the content” (p. 145). Various forms of media could stem from music, magazines, movies, or social networking websites in which individuals identify the underlying social messages conveyed by the medium. This type of critical reflection into popular culture could encourage children to “question and read media from a critical and thoughtful perspective” (Bosacki, 2008, p. 145).

An example of media that could be shown to older adolescents is the movie “*Ma Vie en Rose*” (Scotta & Berliner, 1997). The film follows a young transgender boy and the experiences of his and his family, as they try to establish and fit into a small town. The movie deals with issues of transgender, masculinity, and body image, as the main protagonist believes he will eventually become a girl. After watching this movie, students could then engage in “think, pair, share” where they can critically analyze issues of cultural definitions of gender and masculinity and the othering of individuals who do not or refuse to conform to cultural definitions of gender. Questions created by teachers

guide students to focus on specific aspects of the movie such as what is defined as physically attractive and how physical attractiveness is dependent on gender. Homework assignments could ask students to write self-reflections, focusing on their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences in dealing with body image. The practice of questioning and critically analyzing popular culture and its influence on western society is something that children and adolescents continually engage in (Bosacki, 2008). This practice can also help children and adolescents learn to balance aspects of themselves that they can change and aspects that they cannot change.

As previously stated, it is important to incorporate a wide variety of techniques in creating and implementing any type of program addressing body image (Lao & Bosacki, 2010, November; McVey et al., 2007). Similarly, incorporating a holistic, gender inclusive and developmentally appropriate approach into the classroom provides students the opportunity to understand the social world and apply it to their daily lives (Alverman & Hagood, 2000; Giroux & Simon, 1989). As Clint mentioned, learning about health the way his experiences were was uninteresting to him, as it was something that he believed he could not apply to outside of school.

Kehler (2009) stated that “schools are not neutral sites but are actively involved in a process that either perpetuates or challenges the reproduction of normative masculinities” (p. 159). His research on masculinity in physical education has led to conclude that educators:

Need to alleviate, eradicate, and eliminate the feelings of intimidation and inadequacy often heard from young men...so that their high school experiences

are not allowed to contribute in damaging and enduring ways to poor self-concepts and body image issues among adolescent males. (p. 171)

The experiences of the participants in this study described their teachers as inviting and providing a comfortable atmosphere in which to address body image. However, participants in this study still maintain a professional distance from educators, opting to talk to parents and peers instead about concerns over physical appearance.

An example of providing an inviting atmosphere where students can freely discuss personal concerns was a practice that I experienced as a student while taking an undergraduate course on sexuality. Admittedly, I was hesitant when the professor encouraged us to ask questions pertaining to sexuality. In fact, class members fell silent and students seemed shy to raise their hands. Eventually, the professor insisted we write down our questions on a sheet of paper and submit to him anonymously. He would then pick one or two questions to answer in the next lecture. I found that by submitting questions anonymously, I would not be singled out or judged negatively by my peers. In addition, having the professor choose one or two questions to answer also gave him the opportunity to “screen out” questions that may have been inappropriate or trivialize the seriousness of issues of sexuality. Interestingly, as the semester progressed, I found that the questions I submitted became more detailed, as I based my questions on what my peers had asked.

Creating a “question box” in the classroom may be a particularly useful tool for elementary and secondary school teachers, as it can create an environment in which students can ask questions that they would not normally ask in a large classroom. As with my professor who chose which questions he would answer, teachers also have the

opportunity to create an atmosphere in which issues of body image are not ridiculed or trivialized.

It is important for teachers to establish interpersonal connections with students (McCabe et al., 2010), as not having an inviting atmosphere can reinforce the stereotype of body image as a taboo topic. For example, Klein and Breck (2010) interviewed teacher candidates on their experiences with sex education, focusing on how and where they learned about sexuality. The authors found that a majority of teacher candidates described their sexuality learning experiences as absent or discussed minimally. The authors conclude that the “message given to the students is that sexuality education is embarrassing, intimidating, awkward, and uncomfortable” (Klein & Breck, 2010, p. 7). This can potentially affect the students that these teacher candidates encounter, as their behaviors can be influenced by their own experiences as students. Studies such as Klein and Breck (2010) point out the importance of providing an inviting and psychologically safe atmosphere where all students can freely discuss personal concerns. More importantly, this study emphasizes the importance of educating the educator on how to approach this topic. Teachers can be given a plethora of information or programs on healthy eating and lifestyle choices, but teachers need to constantly talk about the issue. Talking can encourage and raise awareness, ultimately creating an environment in which discussing body image issues are not taboo.

Raising awareness begins early and is a continuous process throughout an individual’s teaching career. Certificate training courses specifically designed for how teachers can approach body image can add to a teacher’s portfolio. For example, Tribes Learning Community (2011) offers online short courses, providing teachers with new

skills in how to provide an inclusive classroom by incorporating different learning strategies. Short courses specifically providing skills and techniques that teachers can use in addressing body image and other sensitive topics can be introduced to teachers as part of professional development. These short courses could also provide information packages for teachers to use in their classroom.

Implications for Future Research

A case study in essence seeks to provide detailed descriptions of the participants involved. This was something I tried to capture, through the interviews and in my self-reflections. Admittedly, this approach was difficult, as was seen by the length of the interviews. The difficulty with conducting this type of study was trying to get participants to elaborate on their responses. There may have been biases and assumptions on both mine and the participants' part, in being able to disclose selective information. For example, my prior research and life experience have led me to conclude what other researchers have: that body image is not an issue pertaining to men and boys. This may have affected the approach I used in asking my interview questions and ultimately, mislead participants into giving socially acceptable responses.

Something I anticipated the participants would discuss, but did not, was the notion of being too healthy. It was salient in their responses and in how their teachers, parents, and peers talked about the topic of body image that it was important in maintaining a healthy lifestyle, including healthy eating habits and healthy exercise. Certainly by emphasizing healthy living, including eating habits and exercise, individuals prevent issues of obesity. What was not mentioned were the consequences of incorporating excessive exercise and diet behavior in attaining a muscular ideal. There has been

research (Labre, 2002; Parkes et al., 2008) linking drug use with attaining a muscular ideal among male adolescents. The participants did not mention their teachers discussing unrealistic muscular ideals, which in extreme cases, could lead to disordered eating, excessive exercise (Lee, 2004), steroid abuse (Saab, 2004), and mental/emotional difficulties such as self-concept issues and social problems (Morgan & Rawana, 2010, May). Future studies could further investigate this branch of body image, investigating male adolescents' perceptions of being too healthy.

There were times during this research journey I found difficult, particularly in engaging the participants to elaborate on their responses. At some moments, responses were merely head nodding and one-word answers. Galilee (2002) addressed this resistance in his study of young adult men. He discussed his experience of reluctance and hostility of his participants (young men) on clothing choices. As he indicated, there was "silence, bemusement, and embarrassment by both the interviewee and [himself]" (Galilee, 2002, p. 42). Similar to Galilee's experiences, the participants in the current study seemed to show a degree of reluctance when discussing certain issues of physical appearance, as was evident in the short interviews and my own difficulty in trying to get the participants to elaborate on their responses.

Despite this reluctance, compared to Galilee, my own experience was not of hostility, as my participants seemed open, confident, and friendly to me. However, this friendliness could be a double-edged sword in that participants were not fully honest in their thoughts and feelings about the issue of body image and responded in what they believed was a socially acceptable manner. That is, they may have potentially downplayed the true degree of their viewpoints about their bodies. This reluctance to

disclose details may be what Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2006) suggest in that there may be an underlying issue to which boys and men may not be ready to disclose.

As with any studies involving a close examination into human thought and behavior, individuals have the capacity to differentiate what they actually feel and what they express to the outside world (Goffman, 1959). In responding in a socially acceptable manner, the participants in this study may have wanted to please the researcher (myself) by responding in a way that they believed I wanted or expected to hear. This may have been due to the participants viewing me as an authority figure. This imbalance of power between the participants and myself may have prevented them from being truly honest in their responses. As stated in Chapter Three, establishing rapport was important in order to allow the participants to get a sense of who the researcher is (Berg, 2001). I attempted to make the participants feel at ease around me, but perhaps a similar future study could utilize multiple interviews with each participant. Seeing the participant on multiple occasions could potentially increase rapport simply by increasing familiarity with the researcher. Multiple interview sessions could also allow the participants to reflect prior to and after each interview, providing a greater elaboration or even a change in their current perspectives.

In retrospect, using a case study methodology may not have been the most appropriate approach in addressing my research questions, as case studies seek to provide an in depth exploration of a topic or issue (Berg, 2001). Using a case study methodology would have been more appropriate had I been more familiar with the participants, interviewing them more than once at different points in time. Despite the difficulties in conducting this study, it was and remains important to conduct qualitative studies on the

issue of body image, especially involving issues that need further exploration. The present study contributes to the growing knowledge of male body image and provides further insight into self-perceptions of physical appearance and its influencing factors on male adolescents.

The results of this study may help to raise awareness for this growing body of research, and may also promote further exploration of the topic of male body image throughout the lifespan. Perhaps further research can note the changing viewpoints of body image why certain individuals associate body image with being a “feminine” or a “gay” issue. Research has thus far examined the experiences of gay men (e.g., Smith, Hawkeswood, Bodell & Joiner, 2011), often in comparison to the experiences of straight men, and comparing muscular or thin ideal between both groups. The participants in the current study did not report their sexual orientation or gender identity, though future research could incorporate the opinions and experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer adolescents. These future studies could ask participants in focus groups to reflect on popular culture’s portrayal of masculinity and its affect on physical attractiveness, health status, and body image via television shows or motion pictures.

The current study attempted to discuss the influence peers had on these male adolescents. While it was found that the male adolescents in this study were influenced by a certain degree by their peers, there was no indication whether the influence was from male or female peers, particularly which gender was more influential with regards to one’s physical appearance. Future studies could further investigate the distinctive influences male and female sex peers have on physical appearance, with questions focusing on either male or female peers. For example, the present study asked

participants to share an experience where they spoke to others about their physical appearance. Future studies could specifically ask participants to share an experience in which they discussed body image issues with male peers and female peers. Asking specific questions could further elaborate the findings of this study.

The participants in the current study ranged from ages 13 to 18 years, providing an insight into the perspectives of body image from different stages of adolescence. A limitation to this approach was that data collection took place at one point in time, not giving a larger degree of their experiences and opinions of body image, as it developed from early to late adolescence. Future studies could examine the developmental trend of body image longitudinally across all genders orientations, particularly how the concepts of gender roles and masculinity as well as femininity interact and shape children's and adolescents' perceptions of body image.

The present study's findings suggest that research needs to continue to help implement school-based developmentally appropriate and gender-inclusive healthy body image programs into the curriculum for both boys and girls. Subsequently, evaluative studies need to be conducted to investigate the effectiveness of how such programs help adolescents to address body image issues and prevent the development of negative and unhealthy body-image attitudes. Future studies could conduct critical analyses of the current programs being used, evaluating its effectiveness for students immediately after program completion and longitudinally. Province or nation-wide program evaluation could uncover whether a specific curriculum is effective or whether it requires improvement.

Conclusion

In the present study, I sought to investigate male adolescents' perceptions of body image, as it pertains to their thoughts and feelings on physical appearance, body image and its associations with feminine and queer issues, and how and where these associations are learned. I also sought to learn the experiences of male adolescents with regards to their experiences in talking about their bodies with others.

I used an exploratory and interpretative approach to my research questions. Using the case study approach, I interviewed six male adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Data analysis consisted of coding the raw data before grouping the codes into themes. In my data analysis, I incorporated what my participants shared with my own self-reflections. By including my self-reflections, I not only learned a great deal about the phenomenon of male body image, I also learned about the psychosocial research regarding adolescent development, including the relationships with oneself and others that help to shape one's future identity. Similar themes were grouped to form general themes. Four themes arose from the present study: body image as a status of health, body image as an expression of masculinity, self-acceptance and self-improvement, and body image as an emotional experience. It was these general themes that enabled me to answer my research questions.

After completing this project, I realized that my own inner thoughts as a researcher were important in incorporating into the results of a study, as it affected the way I interacted with participants. Subjectivity was an issue I grappled with for most of this research experience, as the notion that my past experiences could have affected my interactions with participants and ultimately, the results of the study. I come from an

experimental psychology background, where objectivity was valued. I had an undergraduate psychology professor who constantly reminded us of the importance of being consistent in experimental studies in order to minimize confounding variables that may interfere with our variables of interest (and are manipulating). Admittedly, reflecting on my own thoughts and feelings throughout this entire project was not something I had anticipated, and I often wondered just how much I wanted to disclose about myself to the academic community, including my personal thoughts and life experiences. However, as I became more involved in this project, I learned that in a qualitative inquiry, there are several layers of interrelated concepts and emotions. The popular proverb, “no one [person] is an island” was evident, as demonstrated in the complex relationship between body image and identity formation, gender, and socio-cultural influences (including popular culture, parents, and peers), that interactions are very important. As researchers, questioning our prior assumptions allows us to see existing research, a theory, or a practice from different perspectives. It is in seeing these different perspectives that allow us to revise and improve our current lives.

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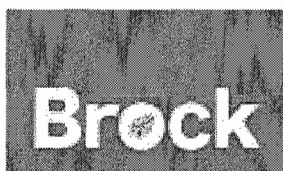
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Appendix A



Ethics Clearance
 Brock University
 Research Ethics Board
 Tel: 905-688-5550 ext. 3035
 Email: reb@brocku.ca

Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research

DATE: February 10, 2011
 PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: BOSACKI, Sandra - Education
 FILE: 09-300 - BOSACKI
 TYPE: Masters Thesis/Project STUDENT:
 SUPERVISOR:
 TITLE: Investigating Perceptions of Body Image in Adolescent Males

ETHICS CLEARANCE GRANTED

Type of Clearance: MODIFICATION Expiry Date: 8/31/2011

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted from 2/10/2011 to 8/31/2011.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are required to submit a Renewal form before 8/31/2011. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Research Ethics web page.

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:

- a) Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;
- c) New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;
- d) Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

Approved:

Michelle K. McGinn

Michelle McGinn, Chair
 Research Ethics Board (REB)

Note: Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of research at that site.

Appendix B

Interview Schedule

1. What does body image mean to you? How do you define body image?
2. Do you have any body image concerns or have you ever had any body image concerns?
 - a. If No: Why?
3. What are your thoughts and feelings when you talk about the topic of body image (if you have or had any) to your parents? Peers? Siblings or other family members?
 - a. Depending on how boys answer the question (i.e.) positive or negative thoughts and feelings: Is there a particular experience in which you felt more comfortable? Less comfortable?
 - b. How do you go about discussing your thoughts and feelings about your body image to your parents? Peers? Siblings or other family members?
4. What are your thoughts and feelings about your physical appearance?
5. What kinds of sources and/or people (media, family, peers, etc.) was your greatest influence (if any) in how body image affected you when you were younger?
6. Some of the research suggests that boys and men may have particular attitudes or views about their bodies, for example, they may be reluctant to talk about their body concerns because they believe that body image is a feminine or a gay issue. What comes to your mind when you think about your own physical appearance?
7. Have you ever talked about body image issues in class? For example, in physical education, health class? What are your thoughts and feelings about being able to talk to teachers or guidance counselors about your body image?
8. What kind of recommendations (e.g. educational activities, curriculum, resources, books, films) would you offer teachers and other educators to address body image issues with you and your peers?

Appendix C

Debriefing Script

There is a lot of research on women and body image, but when it comes to studying male body image, studies have suggested that males believe that "body image is for girls" or "body image is a gay issue." I'm trying to figure out where males learn these things and what reinforces boys' and men's reluctance to talk about this subject.

I'm borrowing from feminist theories and gender identity theory. From the feminist perspective, girls (and women) are at a disadvantage in the education system because the current curriculum focuses on autonomy, independence rather than focusing on emotions. These girls then feel like they have no voice or are silenced in a way because they suppress their emotions. I plan to argue that boys and men also experience this silence, especially when it comes to their bodies because they've learned to not express any of their body concerns.

According to Judith Butler, both gender and sex are culturally constructed. From the moment of birth, we are automatically labeled "it's a boy!" or "it's a girl!" and from then on, we are expected to conform to our assigned sex, including being attracted to the opposite sex. She calls this heteronormativity, where just by our assigned sex, by default, we act according to our respective gender. She then goes on to say that society believes individuals who cross these gender barriers in any way (whether it be being attracted to members of the same sex or boys who express concern over their bodies) are considered pathological - and she gives a really good example of the DSM, where until a few decades ago, homosexuality was still considered a "mental illness."

Also, with gender identity development, adolescence seems to be a time when gender norms are more constricted, which is somewhat contradictory because adolescence is sort of a time for experimentation and exploration of identity, but literature has found that gender roles are more polar. This is especially true for boys, as boys' behaviours are more "policed" by their parents (especially fathers) and peers rather than girls.

I am hoping that this present research will give insight as to why males have been reluctant to disclose their body image concerns, as suggested by past research.

Finally, with an issue as sensitive as body image, I would like to briefly talk about the emotions you may be feeling at this moment. This study may have left you feeling a little uncomfortable or uneasy, but I would like to assure you that what you have disclosed to me today will remain confidential. That means that I will not discuss our interview with anyone else other than my research supervisor.

If you are feeling uneasy about your body issues, please be assured that you are not the only one experiencing body concerns. At the same time, every body is unique in a sense that all bodies come in different shapes and sizes. There is no one specific "beauty ideal."

If you are still feeling uncomfortable, and would like to discuss this further, I encourage you to seek advice from Health Services at Brock University located in Harrison Hall, your family doctor, or Kids Help Phone (1-888-668-6868). If you would like more information on body image and self-esteem, please visit:

http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/body_image/body_image.html

Appendix D
Coding Scheme

Code	Definition
Education (specify)	Participant discusses current educative practices and provides ideas for possible programs.
Encouragement (specify)	Participant discusses strategies that can be used to deal with body image issues.
Exploration (specify)	Participant discusses exploration and trying out new things/pushing limits.
Family influence (specify parents, siblings, extended relatives)	Participant discusses influence of family on their own view of body image.
Gender comparisons	Participant and/or researcher draw comparisons between males and females, citing similarities or differences in body image perceptions.
Independence	Participant discusses activities/thoughts/feelings that they have that separate them from others.
Peer influence (specify same sex, opposite sex)	Participant discusses influence of their peers on their own view of body image.
Peer relationships (specify opposite sex or same sex)	Participant discusses type of peer relationships they have/had. Need to specify if opposite sex or same sex.
Perception of body image	Participant defines what body image means to them as a concept.
Physical appearance: attractiveness/being fit	Participant discusses physical appearance in terms of physical attractiveness.
Physical appearance: health	Participant discusses physical appearance in terms of being healthy/having a healthy lifestyle.
Physical appearance: lifestyle	Participant discusses physical appearance in terms of demeanor/things they can

	change on daily basis.
Responsibility	Participant discusses responsibilities they have (specify).
Sociocultural influence (specify media, pop culture, etc.)	Other influences not in participant's immediate environment. Need to specify type of sociocultural influence.
Support (specify family, friends, educators; emotional, spiritual, etc.)	Participant explains who they've spoken to about body image: family, friends and educators. Also specify type of support (e.g. emotional, spiritual, etc.)